LECTURES

ON

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY:

IN

DOCTRINE, EXPERIENCE, WORSHIP, DISCIPLINE, and MANNERS, as it appeared in the Church at *Jeruſalem*, in the Time of the Apoſtles.

ALSO

On the EPISTLE to the CHURCH at *Sardis*. And on the Faithful in the Days of *Malachi*.

INTERSPERSED WITH

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, and ADDRESSES. With a View to awaken a becoming Zeal for the Communion of Saints, in Order and Love.

By BENJAMIN WALLIN.

——And exhorted them all, that with Purpoſe of Heart they would cleave unto the Lord. ACTS xi. 23.

LONDON:
Printed for the AUTHOR;
And ſold by Meſſ. ROBINSON, KEITH, GARDINER, TOMKINS, DILLY, BUCKLAND, and JOHNSON.
Price bound Six Shillings, or Five Shillings ſewed.

176 –

19½.125.17
C 1385.57
HARVARD COLLEGE
10 Nov. 1843
LIBRARY
Library Fund
33.20
63
14

PREFACE.

THESE Lectures are the ſubſtance of what I delivered ſome years ago; many of which were compoſed on a requeſt for publiſhing two volumes on a variety of ſubjects, containing thoſe here preſented the Reader. I ſoon found the undertaking interrupt me in the more important duties of my office, and therefore laid it aſide, with little or no expectation of reaſſuming the deſign; but laſt Summer, being called off, for a ſeaſon, from my ſtated miniſtrations, I reviſed the manuſcript, and went forward with the work, which providence gave me a further opportunity of purſuing, by laying me under a partial confinement, through a caſualty, under which my life was mercifully ſpared; thus it was finiſhed. And if my attempt to improve this occaſional leiſure ſhould in any degree promote the kingdom of God, I

ſhall have reaſon to rejoice in the affliction, and adore his wiſdom and power, whoſe pleaſure it is to bring good out of evil.

THANKS be to God, the churches have reſt, and liberty of conſcience is preſerved by our gracious ſovereign the King, and his Parliament, who are over us under the moſt High, unto whom *we* are more eſpecially indebted, who view the doctrines and precepts of ſcripture in a light different from the popular opinion, and are obliged to practice accordingly. May this invaluable privilege be improved, by walking in the fear of the Lord, as the primitive diſciples, in Judea and Samaria, after the firſt perſecution, that in like manner, through the comfort and operations of the Holy Ghoſt, we may abundantly increaſe.

THE profane and immoral conduct of many of every rank, in the nation, may juſtly alarm us! We are notoriouſly given to pleaſures, at a time when providence calls us to mourning and

and faſting; witneſs the cries of the induſtrious poor, under a long continued ſcarcity of almoſt every kind of proviſion, &c. but the ignorance and diſorder of many, who by their holy profeſſion, ſhould be as lights of the world, and the ſalt of the earth, is ſtill more threatning. What intercourſe with heaven is held in private, I leave; but, in all appearance, family-devotion is much neglected, nor will it comport with the manner of life in faſhion with moſt; and with reſpect to ſocial religion of a more public nature, it is notoriouſly ſlighted; the pious, of every name, lament a growing neglect of particular chriſtian communion in the land. The multitude, whoſe god is their belly, and who break the ſabbath continually, in purſuit of ſenſual delights, more and more fill the roads and public-houſes, inſtead of attending the houſe of the Lord, while the hearers of the word, in general, regard not the peculiar inſtitutions of Chriſt. In the national church, every native, who is ſprinkled by her miniſter, is conſidered a member, and as ſuch, on a teſtimony of

competent knowledge, faith and ſobriety, entitled to confirmation by the biſhop, and through his hands to the table of the Lord; yet how few claim the privilege! And what excuſe can be made for Diſſenters, who ſeparate under a notion of zeal for the purity of worſhip, and at the ſame time neglect ordinances they allow to be of divine authority; nevertheleſs their number in communion is comparatively ſmall; yea, in ſome inſtances, it is melancholy to ſee how little a church is covered with a large congregation or audience! It may be queſtioned, with grief, what people under heaven, ſo generally omit the principal diſtinguiſhing rites of their religion, as thoſe who call themſelves chriſtians, not excepting them who paſs under the venerable and glorious name of Proteſtants; ſtrictly ſpeaking, there is but little fellowſhip among them, in goſpel-order, according to their own particular ſentiments. The Lord's-ſupper, that criterion of fellowſhip, in which we commemorate the ſufferings of the Saviour, whoſe atonement is the ground of our hope; a feaſt which

he

he has commanded his disciples frequently to keep till he comes; alas, how is it in a manner laid aside! Can we think it was thus when a law was enacted to disqualify persons, who had not taken the sacrament at church within a few months? Surely the communion-table was *then* more frequented in the nation than *now*; and, can we reflect without blushing, on the shameful omission of this principal test of our obedience to Christ?

But, why do I trouble the Reader about the communion of saints, in this or the other particular form? We are fallen in a day when many devoutly disclaim it. It is now very common to make light of ordinances, and even for serious persons to talk as if they valued themselves on being of no denomination of chrlstians; if a man, say they, loves Jesus Christ, or a preacher sets forth the mercy of the Father in him, we have no concern about his form of religion; yet they cry up the martyrs, many of whom might have saved their treasure and

blood, had they made no conſcience of the authority of Chriſt in his houſe. The upright will deprecate a mere name, under any form, however agreeable to the dictates of ſcripture, but if a man intends by his being of no denomination, that he regards not the manner of ſervice appointed by the Lord; where is his religion? They who blame an adherence to peculiar modes, and boaſt in their freedom to a variety in religious ſervice, do well to conſider, that there is certainly a right way of worſhip, preſcribed by the ſole King of ſaints. I may innocently miſtake the ſenſe of his order, but indifference about it can be no proper evidence of my devotion to his will. Indeed if it be a matter of no importance how God is worſhipped, the voluntary ſufferings, exile, and ruin of innumerable perſons and families, who gave ample proof of their real piety, and alſo of their good underſtanding, was the height of folly and madneſs; yea, and ſtill more, the orders of the ſanctuary by our Lord and his inſpired apoſtles, in his name, are impertinent, which no ſober

perſon

perſon will admit. The truth is, that to worſhip God in the way that he hath appointed, is an abſolute duty under every diſpenſation. Jehovah alone is the object of worſhip, and it is his prerogative to direct the manner in which his ſervants ſhall wait upon him; this is left with Jeſus, the head of the church, who before his aſcention, charged his miniſters with teaching the people to obſerve all things whatever he hath commanded them, to the end of the world, which includes, if not principally intends, the orders of his houſe; ſo that while the world ſtands, his diſciples are to be taught to worſhip in the particular way he has preſcribed, and no other, but how this conſiſts with an indifference about the mode of religion, is hard to conceive. Some repreſent the order of ſervice as only the garb or dreſs of religion; be it ſo; it ſhould be remembered, that there is a uniform eſtabliſhed by the infinite wiſdom of our divine lawgiver, which belongs to the obedience of faith, and which cannot be deſpiſed, without affronting the Majeſty of heaven, pouring contempt on the

authority

authority of the Son of God, and danger of ſuperſtition.

It is an allowed criterion of piety, that we eſteem thoſe who fear God of every name, and take pleaſure in the ſpread of his goſpel. If Chriſt is preached, and the power of godlineſs prevails, by whomſoever, or in whatever particular form of profeſſion, his miniſters and people rejoice; yet, if judicious; not ſo but that wherein a man appears defective, in any doctrine of the goſpel, or article of inſtituted worſhip, they muſt wiſh him to know the way of the Lord more perfectly, and conſequently, rather in meekneſs point out his miſtake than join him in his error; and, ſurely, my love to thoſe who differ from me in ſome points of chriſtianity, may conſiſt with a conſcientious regard to every appointment of my Lord. Charity and truth are eſſential, and never to be ſeparated. That love which abounds in knowledge and in all judgment will be ſincere, inoffenſive, fruitful and abiding, and is much to

be

be desired. In a word, that notion of charity, that renders the subject indifferent about any thing which he is persuaded to be the will of Christ, is false and pernicious; it tends to captivate the minds of men from the authority of God, and sap the foundation of all true religion, it is therefore dangerous when, under any pretence, persons are taught to be unconcerned about the appointed form of worship; it should rather be commended to every one to search the scripture, and keep to that which his conscience directs, and regard not the censures of men.

ANOTHER thing which eclipses our glory, is this, namely, the little concern of many, who have a name in the churches, to understand the nature, or practice the duties of their sacred covenant with one another in the Lord; hence they cleave not together, but are rather averse to the unity and order which are appointed, and needful to answer the purpose of particular fellowship; this destroys the foundation

tion of godly diſcipline, from whence alone can be expected the purity and mutual advantage to be hoped for in chriſtian ſociety.

It is gratefully acknowledged, that notwithſtanding theſe defects, there is one thing prevailing, eſpecially in the capital cities, which is highly commendable; many copy after the firſt diſciples at Jeruſalem in a rich liberality, on every occaſion; this bountiful ſpirit is not confined to any particular ſect, but reigns among all ſorts of people, to the honor of the age, but to the ſhame of thoſe who are not to be moved by the moſt ſtriking and popular example; may this hopeful ſymptom, under all our juſt complaints, continue and become univerſal, that a bleſſing in ſtore from on high being poured out upon us, we may revive and flouriſh again! but at preſent we have to bewail our many backſlidings in other reſpects, with the tokens of the divine diſpleaſure upon us; alas the ſcarcity of able and acceptable miniſters; how few the inſtances of converſion! and how little comfort

fort and joy in our aſſemblies; while many wander, or mourn as ſheep without a ſhepherd, the ordinances of the ſanctuary are but in too many inſtances as dry breaſts and a miſcarrying womb! Under theſe ſad circumſtances, ſhall it be thought unſeaſonable that we advert to the ſimplicity and zeal of the firſt chriſtians, with whom the Lord dwelt, that following the original pattern of piety and brotherly love, we may in like manner rejoice in his preſence and bleſſing?

To theſe valuable ends, and for the help of young and ordinary chriſtians, I drew up the following papers, in accompliſhing which I have conſulted ſeveral writers in this and the century paſt, from whom I have found myſelf obliged, with due reſpect, to differ in ſeveral inſtances, for I write to pleaſe no man, and at the ſame time would give no juſt offence to any who are otherwiſe minded, nor will it offend the ingenuous, that I have freely declared my thoughts

thoughts on every point, as it fell in my way; this liberty is granted, when the rules of decency are not tranſgreſſed.

My title will, I hope, be allowed, and not deemed a magiſterial air, to which I have as little inclination as pretence. What led me into this choice was the manner in which theſe pieces were exhibited before they went to the preſs, namely, by reading them over to ſome chriſtian friends in ſtated or occaſional aſſemblies, ſo that they are truly and properly *lectures*. I wiſh they were more correct; but, having diſcovered no capital error, I rely on the ſenſe and goodneſs of the Reader to rectify miſtakes, which are not very numerous. As to the contents; it is at leaſt highly probable that ſome will find their ſentiment, ſpirit or conduct diſapproved, but I am unconſcious of introducing an article with a deſign to reflect on a ſingle perſon or particular ſociety, much leſs have I rejoiced in myſelf; on the contrary,

trary, my own great deficiency has been the occaſion of ſeveral rebukes to be found in this piece; and, permit me to ſay, that if my own ſoul is not warned by theſe meditations, it will come ſhort of the deſire of one, who is deeply convinced of the importance of taking heed, leſt after having preached to others, he himſelf ſhould be a caſt-away.

I SHALL only add further, that I have endeavoured to diſtinguiſh the things which are peculiar to the church, before her order was compleated, an imitation of which is a mark of ignorance and impoſture, from thoſe in which ſhe is an example to future generations. I have likewiſe attempted to point out the cauſe of the declenſions we mourn, and the motives and means of recovery, together with the diſpoſition, and duty of thoſe who fear God in a degenerate age; with what ſucceſs the Reader will judge; his prayer, however, is deſired, that this imperfect eſſay

may

may not be in vain, on which I preſume, and ſubſcribe myſelf his friend and ſervant in the Lord.

THE

THE CONTENTS.

BOOK I.

Containing reflections on the death, reſurrection, aſcention, and exaltation of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

LECTURE I.

AN Introduction to the apoſtles diſcourſe. The murder of Chriſt imputed to the Jews: His death foreknown and determined page 1

LECTURE II.

Notes and reflections on Peter's addreſs to the men of Judea 19

LECTURE III.

The reſurrection of Chriſt, by whom. What is implied in looſening the bands of death 33

LECTURE IV.

What to be underſtood by a witneſs. Who are witneſſes of our Lord's reſurrection: Their credibility 51

LECTURE V.

The Holy Ghoſt a witneſs to the reſurrection of Jeſus: His teſtimony in the believer appealed to by the apoſtle, 1 *John* v. 10. *conſidered and proved* 67

LECTURE VI.

The aſcention of Jeſus: His ſeſſion at the right hand of God 85

LECTURE VII.

The Father's concern in exalting his Son, who immediately receives the Spirit at his hands; with the noble end of his continuance on the throne. Reflections 101

BOOK II.

Being ſome thoughts on the apoſtle's improvement and application of his diſcourſe to the Jews on the day of Pentecoſt.

LECTURE VIII.

Containing the Apoſtle's addreſs to his audience in general: His punctual deſcription of the Saviour. The charge of his murder on the Jews repeated. An earneſt exhortation to conſider him as the Lord's Chriſt; and the convictions which naturally reſult from ſuch a perſuaſion page 116

LECTURE IX.

Notes and reflections on Peter's proclamation and addreſs in the cloſe of his ſermon to the Jews 130

BOOK III.

In which the wonderful ſucceſs of the apoſtle's firſt ſermon at Jeruſalem is particularly conſidered and improved.

LECTURE X.

Shewing the ſtate of their hearts who fell under conviction. By what means they were awakened; and the method they took for relief 143

LECTURE XI.

An improvement on the caſe of thoſe who were convinced by the preaching of Peter, on the day of Pentecoſt 156

LECTURE XII.

The nature of evangelical repentance. What it is to be baptized in the name of Jeſus for the remiſſion of ſins; and in what reſpect the Holy Ghoſt is given to them that believe 169

LECTURE XIII.

The promiſe on which Peter raiſes the expectation of the awakened Jews, upon their obeying the goſpel, briefly and fairly examined, with notes and reflections on the whole of his reply to their anxious queſtion 188

LECTURE

LECTURE XIV.

The converted Jews teſtify their reception of the goſpel, in being baptized and joining the church. Notes on their viſible obedience to the faith page 208

LECTURE XV.

What included in a ſaving reception of the word, and the manner in which it is embraced 221

LECTURE XVI.

The ſource and ſymptoms of that pleaſure which attends a cordial acceptance of the goſpel. The duty of thoſe who embrace it to an immediate external obedience, and the joy of true faith compared with that which may be found with an hypocrite 233

BOOK IV.

Being an hiſtory of the church in her infant ſtate.

LECTURE XVII.

The conſtancy and faithfulneſs of the firſt diſciples in their communion together, under a profeſſion of chriſtianity 252

LECTURE XVIII.

The manner in which the primitive diſciples lived together in the church at Jeruſalem 277

LECTURE XIX.

How the diſciples at Jeruſalem were employed, with practical notes on their conduct 287

LECTURE XX.

The daily increaſe of the primitive church 305

BOOK V.

The early declenſion of the church from her original ſimplicity.

LECTURE XXI.

Introduction. The Lord's teſtimony againſt the diſciples at Sardis. In what reſpects a church may be dead, notwithſtanding ſhe hath a name that ſhe liveth. The occaſions and ſymptoms of this dreadful ſtate. Motives to watch againſt it page 337

LECTURE XXII.

The disciples at Sardis exhorted to repent: Their works are impeached. How the Lord appears a judge of what a people perform in his name. The measures to be taken to restore a church when declined. Reasons for attempting it, notwithstanding her things may be dying away page 357

LECTURE XXIII.

A repetition of the Redeemer's call to repentance, with particular directions; and a threatning in case of disobedience 377

LECTURE XXIV.

The faithful distinguished in a time of general defection, with the promise of a glorious reward 389

LECTURE XXV.

The honors decreed the believer in the day of Christ; being a description of his white raiment, the book of life, and likewise what is implied in not having his name blotted out of that book 404

LECTURE XXVI.

The universal obligation of christians to attend to the voice of the Spirit 425

BOOK VI.

The conduct of the faithful in the days of Malachi.

LECTURE XXVII.

The degenerate state of the Jews. What implied in the saints speaking often one to another; topics of discourse. Reflections 440

LECTURE XXVIII.

What included in thinking on the name of the Lord. His hearkening to his peoples discourse, and book of remembrance explained. Reflections 458

LECTURE XXIX.

Lord of hosts; whence that magnificent title; the day when he will make up his jewels; and what implied in so doing 474

LECTURE XXX.

Christ's people comparable with jewels; their dispersion in time; the certainty of their accomplishment at his coming. Reflections 489

LECTURES

ON

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY, &c.

BOOK I.

CONTAINING

Reflections on the Death, Reſurrection, Aſcenſion, and Exaltation of the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

LECTURE I.

An Introduction to the Apoſtle's diſcourſe—the murder of CHRIST. imputed to the Jews—his death foreknown and determined.

IT is pleaſant and uſeful to behold the power and faithfulneſs of God in ſetting up the kingdom of his Son. It began under a famous ſermon by Peter the apoſtle at Jeruſalem, on the day of Pentecoſt, of which we have a full and particular account in the ſecond of the Acts. On this part of ſcripture ſome following Lectures are grounded; which I hope, by the bleſſing of God, will entertain and comfort the chriſtian who reads them; and if they ſhould fall into the hands of any one in a ſtate of unbelief, I heartily wiſh they may prove a means of conviction.

PENTECOST, it is known, was a feaſt of the Jews, on which they offered the firſt-fruits of the field, Exod. xxiii. 16. It is called, Deut. xvi. 10. "The "feaſt of weeks," being ſeven weeks from the paſſover; and it is ſtiled Pentecoſt, which ſignifies the fiftieth, becauſe it fell on the fiftieth day after the feaſt of unleavened bread, the uſual diſtance between our Eaſter and Whitſuntide. It has been remarked, that this feſtival * happened on the firſt day of the week; for this year it began on Saturday evening: So that on our Lord's-day morning, it might properly be ſaid "to be fully come," ver. 1. This was the day on which Chriſt roſe from the dead, "and became the firſt-fruits of them that "ſlept," 1 Cor. xv. 20. And on the ſame choſen day the Spirit was poured out on the diſciples, who immediately ſpake in a variety of tongues, as he gave them utterance, to the amazement of all who heard them. And thus the Holy Ghoſt bare witneſs to the glory of their aſcended Maſter, and enabled them to publiſh his name in the world. In this manner it pleaſed God to make way for the ſpread of the goſpel; not by a miraculous alteration in the hearers, but by furniſhing his miniſters, who were choſen from illiterate men, with an extraordinary power of ſpeaking his wonderful works to all people in their own native language: this they did in a very large audience, compoſed of perſons providentially collected at Jeruſalem from every nation under heaven, ver. 5. Thus, as hath been often obſerved,

as

* Thus as Chriſt ſuffered at the feaſt of the paſſover he was glorified on the next great feſtival of the Jews, which being in the ſummer, was attended by numbers who otherwiſe would have been abſent.

as the confuſion of language at Babel divided mankind, and ſeparated the world in general from the means of grace, whereby the true knowledge of God was loſt; this vail was deſtroyed, and the nations turned from darkneſs to light, through the gift of tongues in the church.

ONE might have expected, that every one who ſaw the aſtoniſhing fact, would have aſcribed it to the power of God; but alas, what are the greateſt miracles with hardened unbelievers! It is not uncommon for ſcepticks to plead, that they have never ſeen the like wonders performed which are produced in favor of chriſtianity, but experience hath ſhewn, that no kind of evidence, however ſtriking, can remove the inveterate prejudices of men who oppoſe themſelves to the truth: "If they hear not the ſcriptures, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead," Luke xvi. 31. And accordingly in the inſtance before us the multitude marvelled; "they were amazed and in doubt, ſaying one to another, What meaneth this?" But we read of none who were truly convinced; on the contrary, many of them mocked, and were even ſo baſe as to impute this preternatural volubility to the force of new wine; ſome have thought it incredible that any ſhould be ſo extremely abſurd as to imagine that an exceſs of drinking could enable the diſciples to ſpeak with tongues they underſtood not before, and therefore ſuppoſe that theſe ſcoffers, being native Jews, as the next verſe declares, and not acquainted with any dialect but that of their own country, the apoſtles ſeemed

to them as bablers; but, why ſhould any be ſurprized that a generation, who had been taught to reproach our Lord with caſting out devils by Beelzebub, and who had afterwards crucified him as an impoſtor, ſhould be ſtupid and malicious enough, thus to apprehend, or miſrepreſent this wonderful energy of the Holy Ghoſt? However, this is their charge: "Theſe men are full of new wine."

To this ſlander, Peter, ſtanding up with the eleven, and having intreated a hearing, replies, that it was but "the third hour of the day," or nine in the morning: this was the time of the daily ſacrifice, at which the Jews in general came faſting, and at theſe feſtivals they were accuſtomed to abſtain from wine till noon; it was therefore moſt unreaſonable to imagine that theſe men were drunken. From this pertinent remark the apoſtle haſtens to obſerve, that what they ſaw and heard was no other than what Joel the prophet foretold, by whom God ſaith, "And it ſhall "come to paſs in the laſt days, I will pour out my "Spirit on all fleſh." By the laſt days the prophet intended, and the Jews themſelves underſtood, the days of the Meſſiah, when "all fleſh ſhould ſee the "ſalvation of God;" for it is written, "that whoſoever ſhall call on the name of the Lord, ſhall "be ſaved." The apoſtle having explained this appearance from ſcripture, in faithfulneſs turns on theſe Jeruſalem-ſinners, and with a view to their repentance, boldly charges them with the murder of Jeſus, and points out the light againſt which they ſinned in ſhedding his blood, and alſo that their end was not

obtained

obtained without the counſel of heaven, ver. 22, 23. "Ye men of Iſrael, hear theſe words; Jeſus of Na-"zareth, a man approved of God among you, by "miracles and wonders and ſigns, which God did by "him in the midſt of you, as ye yourſelves alſo know: "him being delivered by the determinate counſel "and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and "by wicked hands have crucified and ſlain." Thus, from a general report of certain ſalvation in Chriſt to every one that believes, which is the tenor of the goſpel, his miniſters are without reſerve to lay before ſinners their evil and danger, that obtaining mercy they may repent and be ſaved.

FROM this introduction it appears that the apoſtle directs himſelf to the Jews who dwelt at Jeruſalem, and that they were prepared for his alarming remonſtrance, by his reaſoning out of ſcripture relating to Jeſus whom they had crucified, and alſo concerning the effuſion of the Spirit at which they had ignorantly ſcoffed; and this no doubt was ſubſervient, by the bleſſing of God, to thoſe painful convictions under which many of them hereafter cry out.

PETER might have upbraided them as Stephen did on another occaſion, chap. vii. 51. "Ye ſtiff-necked "and uncircumciſed in heart and ears, ye do always "reſiſt the Holy Ghoſt!" They deſerved to be ſtiled a perverſe and abſurd generation, who had no regard to reaſon or truth; but behold he accoſts them as the people of God, and under a title which was to their honor, "Ye men of Iſrael." In Iſa. xli. 14. the

Lord thus addreſſes his people, "Thou worm Jacob:" Not in contempt, but in compaſſion he ſpeaks in this manner, to let them know, that though in themſelves, and according to their own apprehenſion, they were, as Jacob their Father, greatly afflicted and threatned, helpleſs and mean as a worm; nevertheleſs he, their mighty Redeemer, would help them, and their adverſaries ſhould be as nothing: But Peter's deſign was to ſhew the regard he had for the Jews, while he ſpared not to cenſure their folly and wickedneſs, and accordingly he ſtiles them "men of Iſrael." And under a more reſpectful character he could not beſpeak them; yet what could more highly reflect on their conduct? Great was the honor and advantage of being a deſcendant from Iſrael, that renowned patriarch; in this they might have gloried, had they behaved as became their eminent anceſtor; on the other hand, their baſeneſs in the crucifixion of Jeſus, and blaſpheming his diſciples, who were endued with the Holy Ghoſt, appeared in proportion to this their high character, and the priviledges they enjoyed: They were Iſraelites, and many of them, it is probable, leaders of the people, to whom were committed the oracles of God, and who profeſſed to be waiting for the Meſſiah, and the effuſion of the Spirit, which aggravated their conduct; and no doubt this manner of addreſs was deſigned the more deeply to affect them with a ſenſe of their guilt: With the ſame view the prophets frequently, under the ſame character, call on the degenerate Jews to repent, Hoſea xiii. 9. "O Iſrael, "thou haſt deſtroyed thyſelf." And again, chap. xiv. 1. "O Iſrael, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou "haſt fallen by thine iniquity." In theſe, and other-

like

like places, this backſliding people are ſtiled *Iſrael*, as I apprehend, at leaſt among other things, to ſhew how unworthy they acted in departing from the Lord; and it muſt be acknowledged that this was an excellent means of conviction.

THE apoſtle proceeds, and craves their attention, "Hear theſe words;" which, in connexion with what went before, runs to this purpoſe, q. d. 'O ye 'men of Iſrael; you ſee how unreaſonable it is to 'ſuppoſe, that theſe perſons are drunken, or to ima-'gine that the exceſs of new wine ſhould enable 'them to ſpeak in this variety of tongues: this abi-'lity proceeds from the Spirit, which the prophet 'foretold ſhould be poured out in the days of the 'Meſſiah; now I have ſomewhat to ſay which nearly 'concerns you, I beſeech you therefore patiently 'to hear me.' Note, it is the univerſal and earneſt deſire of miniſters, who ſeek the ſalvation of their hearers, that they attend without prejudice, that under a divine bleſſing, they may convince them of error, and bring them to repentance.

BUT, what are theſe words? They are words, the hearing of which would make their ears tingle; yea words which hereafter appear to make their hearts tremble: Words by which the divine Spirit raiſed thoſe convictions that pierced and punctually wounded their conſcience. The apoſtle might well be anxious for an hearing, for there was reaſon to expect that theſe bold tranſgreſſors would ſtop their ears againſt the heavy charge he was about to lay

on them. For what impenitent criminal will liſten to the voice of his accuſer? but with God all things are poſſible; he can draw the ear of the moſt obſtinate ſinner, as a means of convincing his heart, at his pleaſure, and his hand is evident in the preſent caſe, ſince, otherwiſe, why ſhould they not behave in the ſame manner as with Stephen the martyr, mentioned before? However, what Peter delivered in general, related to their having crucified the Lord, notwithſtanding they had ſeen the fulleſt teſtimony of God in his favor. It contains his deſcription of the Saviour, the ſtriking evidence afforded theſe Jews of his divine miſſion, their concern in his death, and the counſel of God in reſpect of this amazing ſcene of iniquity and blood; from whence may be drawn a variety of uſeful obſervations.

In deſcribing our Saviour, whom theſe men had ſlain, the apoſtle ſtiles him "Jeſus of Nazareth." Now Nazareth we know was a poor and ſmall city on the borders of Zebulun, and held in the utmoſt contempt. Hence ſaith Nathaniel to Philip, "Can there any good "thing come out of Nazareth?" John i. 46. But that which men diſeſteem is frequently honored by God: This poor deſpiſed city was the place where Joſeph and Mary reſided, and conſequently where the incarnate Son of God dwelt a conſiderable part of his time in the fleſh; yet, alas! what are the moſt diſtinguiſhing external advantages! There was no connexion between the place of our Lord's abode and a participation of his grace: This city was no leſs notorious for its perverſe infidelity than its very great meanneſs;

neſs; ſo hardened were the inhabitants, that on our Lord's preaching to them, and upbraiding them with their incredulity, they rejected him with the utmoſt indignation, and in wrath attempted to deſtroy him, Luke iv. 28, 29. And accordingly he ſoon left them becauſe of their unbelief; ſo that there is reaſon to fear that the generality of thoſe among whom the Saviour of the world lived more than thirty years, periſhed in their ſins. Thus perſons may be highly exalted in an early enjoyment of the richeſt means of grace, and in the pride and wickedneſs of their heart ſink deep into hell, under a fatal oppoſition to the counſel of God!

But to return: It may ſeem ſtrange at firſt, that Peter, who appears at this time to have a realizing proſpect of the Redeemer now exalted at the right-hand of God, ſhould mention him under this diminutive character; but when we conſider to whom he was ſpeaking, and the deſign he was upon, we ſhall admire the propriety of this choſen deſcription. He is addreſſing the Jews, with a view to convince them, that this ſame Lord, of whom Joel propheſied, and in whom alone ſalvation is to be found, was no other than that very perſon whom they had unrighteouſly ſlain. Now what could be more to his purpoſe than to ſpeak of him under the identical terms by which he was deſcribed in the writing over his head when he hung on the croſs? Which is known to run thus; "Jeſus of Nazareth the King "of the Jews," John xix. 19. q. d. that ſame Jeſus, whom ye in contempt call Jeſus of Nazareth, is no other than that great perſon of whom the prophet

ſpeaks,

ſpeaks, in calling on whoſe name the ſubject ſhall be ſaved. Beſides, in deſcending to this deſcription of the Saviour, the apoſtle is not aſhamed to own his Lord in that very character under which he was deſpiſed and perſecuted to death; and he likewiſe aſcends with the greater advantage to his glorious ſtate in heaven. An inſtance of courage and wiſdom we may juſtly admire!

THE next thing which Peter remonſtrates is, the ample and undeniable proof offered the Jews of our Lord's divine miſſion. This was admirably calculated to affect them with a ſenſe of their folly, which was a main thing in view; it was as full and as ſtrong as could poſſibly be given: "A man approved of God." Jeſus was approved, and ſometimes applauded by men; his mighty works and holy converſation rendered him, for a ſeaſon, admired and followed as an extraordinary perſon; but the Jews are called upon to reflect on the undeniable and glorious teſtimony they had received from heaven; "A man approved of God †, by miracles, "wonders and ſigns:" The wonderful works by which the Father teſtified of his Son in the courſe of his miniſtry were many, and known to theſe men. Theſe miracles were not done in a corner, or at a diſtance, but openly and among them; "which God "did by him in the midſt of you," ſaith the apoſtle, i. e. in your ſynagogues, in the temple, and in places of

† δυνάμεσι τέρασι εἰ σημείοις are words nearly of the ſame ſignification; and, however critically diſtinct, ſeem in this place each to convey the idea of works or tokens above or contrary to the courſe of nature, and may be conſidered as a redundancy of expreſſion, to ſhew the number and variety of thoſe amazing teſtimonies of a divine power manifeſt by Chriſt.

of public reſort. They were not lying wonders, but miracles indeed, the reality of which no man could decently queſtion: ſigns which were evident, and of which his enemies themſelves were convinced; and accordingly he adds, "Ye yourſelves alſo know;" q. d. 'O ye men of Iſrael, ye are witneſſes to the truth 'of what I declare, for theſe divine works were per-'formed in your preſence! Did ye not daily behold, 'in Jeruſalem, many wonders and ſigns wrought by 'Jeſus, by which God approved him? You cannot 'deny it.' Thus he appeals to their conſciences, and many of them were deeply convinced on reflection, and ſorely wounded under a ſenſe of their guilt, as will hereafter appear.

HAVING repreſented their perverſe incredulity in withſtanding ſo clear divine evidence to the character of Jeſus, the apoſtle proceeds to the concern which the Jews had in his death. It was his great deſign to convince them that they were guilty in ſhedding the blood not only of an innocent perſon, but of killing the Meſſiah, that being awakened, they might repent of this hainous tranſgreſſion and all other ſins, and call on his name and be ſaved; he, therefore, ſpares not to charge them directly with crucifying and ſlaying the man whom God had approved, in which he is very circumſtantial.

HE firſt obſerves that they took him. "Him have "ye taken." Now this may include their laying hands on him as upon a malefactor, with all the ill-treatment they gave him from his being apprehended

to

to their nailing him on the croſs. Our Lord himſelf ſaid, Matt. xxvi. 55. "Are you come out as againſt a thief with "ſwords and ſtaves?" In this manner they came with Judas their guide, and when they had, by means of the execrable traitor, found our Saviour in the garden, by his own permiſſion, they ſeized him, and led him bound to his judges to be condemned, in order to which they ſubborned falſe witneſs againſt him; and when he was delivered into their hands they impiouſly inſult and curſe him for an impoſtor; they mock, ſpit upon, and crown him with thorns, and, having unmercifully ſcourged him, thus mangled, they bring him with bitter revilings up to mount Calvary: In a word, they treated the divine Jeſus with all the contempt and cruelty which the malice of earth or hell could invent. In this vile manner the Jews apprehended and dealt with our Lord; and there is reaſon to think that while Peter expreſſed theſe words, "Him have ye taken," ſome individuals preſent began to reflect with ſhame on their own concern in this wicked tranſaction.

THEN comes the charge of his death. "Him ye "have crucified and ſlain." Crucifixion is known to be a manner of puniſhment uſed by the Romans; it was inflicted only on ſlaves, and that for crimes the moſt infamous: He that ſuffered this kind of death bore † his croſs on his ſhoulders to the place of execution, where, being ſtripped of his clothes, he was

† Not the whole croſs, but the Patibulum, or piece of timber that lay croſs the erect part which ſtood fixed in the earth, and on which the arms of the criminal were ſtretched.

was faſtened naked unto it, and this was uſually, if not always with nails, attended with the cauſe of his death written over his head, in capital letters. Now we know that this exactly agrees with the manner in which our Lord was treated by the Jews; ſo that they dealt with him as with the baſeſt of men and the vileſt of criminals! Such was the rage and envy of theſe Jeruſalem-ſinners; they thirſted after his blood; their malice prompted them to ſhed it in a manner the moſt ignominious and painful. He was crucified and ſlain indeed under a form of law, and by the hands of the civil magiſtrate, which had a ſpecious appearance, nevertheleſs the holy and innocent Jeſus was unjuſtly cut off out of the land of the living, and his crucifiers are truly ſaid to kill him, and charged with his murder. Acts iii. 15. chap. vii. 52. compared.

THE means by which they ſhed the blood of the Saviour, is the next thing which the apoſtle remarks; namely, "by wicked hands;" for the underſtanding of this, we are to remember the civil ſtate of the Jews at this time; they were now in ſubjection to the Romans, under whom they enjoyed far greater privileges than a conquered people might expect; but it was the well-known policy of that famous ſtate to protect the nations they ſubdued in the free exerciſe of their own religion, and accordingly the Jews were in this reſpect remarkably favored, inſomuch that they were allowed to kill a Gentile, even though he were a Roman, who preſumed to enter and defile their temple. On this pretence it was that ſome went about

about to ſlay Paul, as appears by comparing Acts xxi. 29. with chap. xxvi. 21. So highly were they indulged by their heathen maſters; they had alſo a power to judge petty offences, and to inflict leſſer penalties by their counſel where the high-prieſt preſided in chief, but they could not judicially puniſh any criminal with death. This point indeed, like moſt other articles hath been diſputed, but it ſeems evident from the inſtance before us, the Jews had not the power of life and death; as a learned and laborious writer ‡ obſerves. If in any caſe they had this authority, it muſt have been in the caſe of our Lord, whoſe ſole charge was blaſphemy, in aſſuming the character of the Meſſiah: it was therefore a point of religion in which the Romans, who, as hinted, gave their conquered ſubjects full liberty, would not have concerned themſelves, had they in any caſe allowed the Jews the authority of capital puniſhment, nor would a people ſo fond of power, and I may ſay, ſo enraged againſt Jeſus, and determined to take away his life, have committed a cauſe within their own juriſdiction to a foreigner, or left his execution to the will of the Romans; but that which one ſhould think would ſet it beyond all diſpute is their own declaration to Pilate, John xviii. 31. When the governor bids them take Jeſus and judge him according to their law, which indeed they had already done, for they had brought him in guilty of death, ſee Mat. xxvi. 66. John xix. 7. but it was not

‡ Dr. Lardiner's Credibility, vol. I. page 77. See alſo page 97, 154. Whether the Jews had this power taken from them, or loſt by their own negligence, as Dr. Lightfoot aſſerts. It is, I think, generally allowed, that they enjoyed not this priviledge forty years before the temple was deſtroyed, Lardiner, vol. I. 201.

not in their power to execute this ſentence. Hence the anſwer is this; "It is not lawful for us to put any "man to death;" and accordingly they brought him to the judge, who though he was convinced of the innocence of Jeſus, and knew that for envy the Jews had delivered him, yet ſo baſe was this magiſtrate, that through fear, or with a ſiniſter end, he yielded to the popular cry, and gave up this holy perſon to the will of theſe wretches, ſee Matt. xxviii. 18—24. Thus the Jews crucified and ſlew our Lord, not by their own, but by the hands of the Romans; theſe hands were thoſe of Pilate that wicked man and unjuſt judge, and the officers and ſoldiers under him, who, being ſtimulated by the voice of the multitude, ſtirred up by their leaders, were but too eager in the execution of his unlawful ſentence. The Jews themſelves took Jeſus, with their own hands into which he was betrayed, and did unto him ſpitefully as they could, but they could not put him to death; this they brought about by means of the Roman civil power, who moſt unrighteouſly crucified him as a malefactor; it is therefore truly declared, that with wicked hands, that is, of others, they ſlew him, which the ſacred hiſtorian moſt accurately placeth in his account, between the apprehending and crucifixion of our Lord, according to the fact. Thus the ſcripture was fulfilled, Pſ. xi. 2. "The kings of the earth ſet themſelves, and "the rulers take counſel together, againſt the Lord "and againſt his anointed." And as Chriſt came into the world to ſave Jews and Gentiles, they were both concerned in putting him to death.

BUT there is nothing in the whole of the addreſs more inſtructive or important than the divine hand in this affecting event. The death of Chriſt was no precarious or caſual thing, but ſettled in the counſel of God, whoſe underſtanding is infinite, and who declareth the end from the beginning; this the apoſtle aſſerts; "Him, being delivered * by the determi-"nate § counſel and foreknowledge of God." The ſame is confirmed and explained by Peter and John on another occaſion, Acts iv. 27, 28. "For of a truth "againſt thy holy child Jeſus both Herod and Pon-"tius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of "Iſrael, were gathered together, for to do whatſoever "thy hand and thy counſel determined before to be "done." The word determined ‡, in this proof indeed differs from that in the paſſage we are upon, but the idea is the ſame, and they concur to aſcertain the predeſtination of this great event. It was determined, i. e. ſay ſome it was written, which no doubt is a truth; thus

* It has been ſuggeſted, that for particular reaſons the Jews voluntarily ſurrendered Jeſus, though they might themſelves have put him to death, but we have already ſeen they had not this power, [and Dr. Lardiner has proved that the word ἐκδόσον in this place does not carry in it a yielding any civil authority or right, and ſhewn that it is uſed in the New-Teſtament for the act of private perſons who proſecute, or bring any one before a court of juſtice in order to be condemned, and I think he has alſo entirely removed the moſt plauſible pretence for this opinion. See Lardiner's Credibility, Vol. I. page 86.

§ ὡρισμένη a ὁρίζω to declare, as by definitive ſentence, Rom. i. 4. or to ordain, or decree, as in Acts x. 42. where it is uſed to expreſs the divine ordination of Chriſt to the office of judge.

‡ προωρίσε to foreordain or predeſtinate, Rom. viii. 30. 1 Cor. ii. 7. Eph. i. 5.

thus ſaith our Lord, Luke xxii. 22. "The Son of "man goeth, as it is determined;" and in Matt. xxvi. 24. in relating the ſame, the ſacred hiſtorian uſes the phraſe "it is written;" for the ſame was both determined and written; but we are not to reſolve the determination of Chriſt's death into a ſimple prediction, as if it was determined in no other ſenſe than as declared in the ſcripture: things are not properly determined becauſe declared in God's word; on the contrary, they are foretold becauſe predetermined. The decree of God is the ground of prophecy, which is no other than a revelation, as providence is the execution, of the divine will. Nothing can be plainer than that the blood-ſhedding of Jeſus was not only foreknown, but truly and properly predetermined by the moſt High who worketh all things after the counſel of his own will. And what Peter now preacheth concerning this point he afterwards wrote in his firſt epiſtle, chap. i. 20. "Who," ſays he, meaning Chriſt, "was ve-"rily fore-ordained," i. e. to his ſufferings and death, as appears from the context, "before the foundation of "the world." To which agreeth Rev. xiii. 8. where he is ſtiled, "The Lamb ſlain from the founda-"tion of the world." And this is the current of ſcripture. So then the delivery of the innocent Jeſus into the hands of the wicked to be crucified, as I may ſay, according to the known idea of the terms, was ſettled in the definitive counſel of God from everlaſting; it was all fixed before in that adorable conſtitution, the covenant of redemption, of which the Son of God is the Mediator and Surety; and indeed his being delivered was in conſequence of his undertaking in that

holy and gracious compact, to be the Subſtitute of the people; by which a juſt and legal foundation was laid, for his bearing their ſins in his own body on the tree.

THIS is the addreſs of the apoſtle to the men of Judea, who killed our Lord. After beſpeaking their attention in a manner moſt reſpectful, he plainly and faithfully remonſtrates their aggravated guilt, in preſuming thus to ſhed the blood of the innocent and holy Jeſus, in defiance of all the miracles which God did by him in the midſt of them, as a teſtimony of his character; he poſitively charges his murder upon them, though they could not themſelves perpetrate this horrid fact, but did it by the hands of other wicked men, who put him to death, and then he declares that he being thus delivered into their hands to be crucified and ſlain, was determined before in the counſel of God; which might juſtly alarm them, and made way for a further account of Jeſus in proof of his being the Meſſiah; an addreſs which, by the bleſſing of God, proved a means of the converſion of many who heard him, and who, as it afterwards appears, cried out in diſtreſs, under a ſenſe of their periſhing condition, and being inſtructed, gladly embraced the word of the goſpel. Many other glorious things are ſpoken of Jeſus who was crucified; but, before we proceed, it may be uſeful to pauſe, and reflect on ſeveral points which ſtand ſupported by this remonſtrance of the apoſtle to the Jews; and this will be attempted in the following lecture.

LECTURE

LECTURE II.

Containing notes and reflections on Peter's addreſs to the men of Judea.

THE foregoing Lecture, contains the apoſtle's high charge on the Jews with the murder of our Lord, in prevailing on the Romans to crucify him, and the foreknowledge and counſel of God, in reſpect of this ſcene of iniquity and blood, in the preſent the Reader is deſired to conſider the following articles, which appear from the account, and nearly concerns us!

I. THE inſufficiency of every kind and degree of evidence to convince the unbeliever, and bring him to repentance. This has already been hinted, and is a point fully proved in the inſtance before us. The abſurd light in which the ſcornful and prejudiced Jews placed the wonderful effects of the Spirit, in their unfair, if not malicious imputation on the diſciples, who ſpake by his influence, evidently ſhews their inſuperable perverſeneſs; and their crucifying Jeſus, notwithſtanding the repeated and undeniable teſtimony from heaven in his favor, is no leſs a proof that all external means whatever are in themſelves inſufficient to open the eyes, or turn the hearts of men enſlaved to ſin and unbelief. What could be more ſtriking, or more adapted to convince the Jews that Jeſus was the Chriſt, than the

variety of miracles and wonders, by which God approved him in their ſight? Yet, behold this ſeries of ſupernatural works are in vain! theſe men were filled with envy and malice againſt our Lord, for no other reaſon than that of his aſſuming the character of Meſſiah; and, being left to their own will, nothing could prevent their ſhedding his blood. In like manner all unbelievers are hardened; however their circumſtances may differ, ſuch is the power and deceit of the fleſh, that thoſe who are in it, are proof againſt every means of conviction, even miracles themſelves cannot turn them. The carnal mind is enmity againſt God, and will ever find an excuſe for perſiſting in oppoſition to his will; it is not ſubject to his law, and deſpiſes his grace; and he that is under its dominion, if left to himſelf, will withdraw from the cleareſt light; he will either prevent, or by ſome means ſtifle convictions, for he is a rebel in heart, and in nothing is he more determined than againſt a ſubmiſſion to God and his righteouſneſs: ſo ſtout is corruption in the unregenerate mind that nothing can remove it; mere moral ſuaſion is by no means ſufficient; yea, if reaſoning out of the ſcriptures is attended with miracle on miracle and prodigies without number, unleſs a divine power is exerted in the ſinner, even this, or whatever elſe of an external nature, can be conceived, will certainly fail of bringing an Infidel to repent. Again,

II. We ſee that the condemnation of thoſe who finally reject the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, will be in proportion to the evidence afforded them of his divine miſſion, and the means of grace they have enjoyed. This awful

awful truth ſtands confirmed by the inſtance before us. The abundant teſtimony God gave to his Son, in the midſt of Jeruſalem, is urged by the apoſtle on the Jews who crucified and ſlew him, to ſhew the aggravations of their guilt in that murder. Let him that in wantonneſs deſpiſes or neglects the ſalvation of God beware! Think, O careleſs and ſcornful tranſgreſſor, what a judgment awaits thee, if thou die in unbelief! The impenitent man, unto whom the goſpel has been preached, and in whoſe days it hath flouriſhed, ſhall hereafter find that every ſermon he has heard, and every inſtance of converſion he hath ſeen, will riſe up and witneſs againſt him, at the tribunal of Chriſt; and how wilt thou endure the wrath of the Lamb, when he is revealed from heaven in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them who obey not the goſpel! But,

III. How aſtoniſhing is it that the luſts of men, ſhould be overruled to fulfil the purpoſe of God! To make evil anſwer a good and valuable end, is a noble effect of infinite wiſdom. A moſt illuſtrious inſtance of this appears in the goſpel of Jeſus, in which we behold the choſen redeemed to life everlaſting by his ſufferings and death. Herein is the wiſdom of God in a myſtery indeed! He hath taken occaſion, from the moſt ſhameful and hateful evil, to yield the brighteſt diſplay of his love, and of all his perfections; for in no point of light doth the glory of God ſhine with that ſplendor as it doth in Chriſt, in whom the Father hath righteouſly magnified his grace, in advancing his people to a bleſſedneſs, in

ſome reſpects ſuperior to that which would have reſulted from innocence itſelf. The ſame adorable wiſdom is ſeen in accompliſhing this great deſign, by the crucifixion of Jeſus. Behold, the vileſt paſſions of men fulfil the counſel of God! their luſts prompt them to do what no one could with reaſon expect; for by the moſt flagrant inſtance of wickedneſs, they ſtrangely bring to paſs the deſign of him againſt whom they rebel. How unlikely was it, that Jeſus of Nazareth, who in every tittle ſo plainly anſwered the prophecies of the Meſſiah, or that he who was ſo circumſtantially pointed out in the ſcripture, ſhould be put to death by the people, to whom were committed the oracles of God! It is wonderful indeed, that the men, who had ſeen undeniable teſtimonies from heaven to the authority of Jeſus, ſhould nevertheleſs ſet themſelves to prove him an impoſtor, and be ſatisfied with nothing leſs than his blood; and, ſtill more aſtoniſhing, that in this baſe attempt they ſhould put him to death, in the very manner the prophets deſcribe! It had been eaſy for the Jews to have taken away the life of our Saviour in a method contrary to the account given of the Meſſiah, and thereby thrown a doubt on his character; but behold they are diligent to do to this Jeſus whatever the ſcriptures declare ſhould be done to him they expected, as if they deſigned to prove him that very Chriſt he profeſſed himſelf to be. Who could have thought that the injuſtice, folly, hatred and cruelty of theſe wicked men, was ſubſervient to the juſtice, wiſdom, love and mercy of God! "O "the depth of the riches, both of the divine wiſdom and "knowledge!" "How unſearchable are God's judg-

"ments,

"ments, and his ways paſt finding out!" Surely his counſel ſtands, whoever ſins, or whoever ſuffers! If the vileſt of luſts and a conduct againſt all humanity and righteouſneſs, in a people profeſſing the fear of Jehovah, could have defeated the purpoſe of heaven, it had now been the caſe; but lo, Jeſus is "delivered by the "determinate counſel and foreknowledge of God." Could not the Almighty have reſtrained the wicked that they might not have found their hands? No doubt he could have interpoſed and defended the innocent from blood: it was therefore his will to permit it, but for an end worthy of himſelf, that grace might reign through righteouſneſs in the ſalvation of ſinners through the death of his Son. And indeed it is unworthy of God to ſuppoſe that he will ſuffer any kind of evil which ſhall not prove an occaſion of good to his glory. But then,

IV. We are to note, That the decrees of God, which are infallible in their event, entirely conſiſt with the free agency of man who acts under them. All things are poſſible, yea, and certain in conſequence of the divine counſel. Thus there was a neceſſity of infallibility in the death of Jeſus; i. e. it could not but fall out as God had determined, that Chriſt ſhould be delivered into the hands of the wicked, and be crucified and ſlain in the manner deſcribed; nevertheleſs there was no neceſſity of compulſion, whereby the freedom of their action who killed him, was interrupted. The decree of God is not properly the cauſe of any thing that comes to paſs, but of the futurition of its ſubject: And his decree of permiſſion, in reſpect of the ſin of the Jews, had no phyſical or moral influence

on any of the people concerned, each one acted freely, and of choice. The pretence ſome have againſt the divine decrees, as being inconſiſtent with man's free agency, is groundleſs, and no other than a cavil, ſince nothing is clearer on record, than that our Saviour was delivered and crucified according to the determinate counſel and foreknowledge of God, and at the ſame time it is equally plain, that the Jews moſt freely and wilfully ſlew him. And thus it is always in reſpect of the ſinful actions of men, as one obſerves, "they ſin 'as freely as if there was no decree, and yet as infal-'libly as if there was no liberty,' ſo then God is not the author of ſin, though men ſin according to the divine foreknowledge and counſel. In a word, on the one hand, there is not the leaſt colour for the imputation of evil to the Almighty, who decrees to permit ſin as the occaſion of good for his own glory, nor, on the other, of excuſe for the tranſgreſſor, who, when he ſinneth, acts freely, not to fulfil the will of God, but to gratify his own. It follows,

V. THAT the moral evil of thoſe ſinful actions, which are permitted by the counſel of God, are juſtly imputed and involve the tranſgreſſor in guilt. The wickedneſs of a criminal is not the leſs, becauſe his unrighteous act was foreknown, or fell in with the divine purpoſe, ſince his action was free, and committed to ſatisfy his own carnal inclinations; his wicked conduct is no other than wilful rebellion, and deſerves to be puniſhed. It was a righteous thing with God to pour out his long threatened vengeance on the rebellious Jews, who in that generation filled up the meaſure of their iniquity, in crucifying his Son. Sinners may

now

now preſume, impiouſly to blaſpheme the decrees of the Almighty, or think to ſkreen themſelves under them, but their mouths will be ſtopped, when God ſhall judge the ſecrets of men; then, alas, too late they will be convinced, and ſee that they have deceived their own ſouls, and that the reward of their doings is juſt; when they ſhall go away into everlaſting puniſhment! And further,

VI. It ſhould not be omitted, that men are chargeable with the evil that others commit at their inſtigation. The aſſaſſine is not more truly worthy of death, than he that procured him to take away the life of his neighbour. 1 Sam. 22. 21. Saul, ſaith Abiather, hath ſlain the Lord's prieſts. Uriah the Hittite was ſlain by the ſword of the enemy, yet David who ordered him in the front of the battle, with a view to his death, is juſtly charged with ſhedding his blood. In like manner, theſe men of Iſrael, though they did not, for they could not with their own hands, put to death the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, yet having condemned him by falſe accuſation, and procured the power by which he was crucified, are truly declared his murderers. The Jews were no leſs guilty than the Romans, and under the imputation of that guilt, each one concerned periſhed, who obtained not remiſſion through faith in that blood which he ſhed. Thus we have reaſon to conclude, that many will be condemned in the great and laſt day for crimes which they had not in their power themſelves to commit, but which, to gratify their luſts, they prompted others to do. O let us take heed that we are not the occaſion, eſpecially the *wilful* occaſion of other mens ſins, for he that is ſo

ſhall

ſhall not be clear, but is juſtly liable to the puniſhment due to the evil committed. Once more:

VII. NOTE, It becomes the miniſters of the goſpel, to be bold in reproving ſinners, and faithfully to remonſtrate all the guilt that is evident upon them. Mankind are far more ſinful than they can apprehend, while in their natural ſtate, ſo that moſt hearers lie under vain conceits, which, if not removed, will prove their deſtruction, and therefore, however it may be diſreliſhed by many, there is need of inſiſting much on original and heart-corruption, the curſe of the law, and the certain and everlaſting perdition of him that dies in his ſins, leſt the blood of ſouls is required at our hands: but, beſides the general ſtate and conduct of men ſince the fall, which calls for plain dealing, there are often many particular evils in practice to be ſet home on the conſcience; when theſe become notorious and habitual, we ought after the example of the apoſtle in this caſe, with all due reſpect to their perſons, to tell the guilty of their crimes. It requires great wiſdom and courage duly to warn them who preſume, eſpecially thoſe who are of a diſtinguiſhed character: we are not to be rude, nor yet on the reſerve. Peter, you ſee, accoſts theſe Jeruſalem-ſinners, as men of Iſrael, yet ſpares not to charge them with the murder of Chriſt: in like manner a miniſter may be civil, and, at the ſame time, ſincere; he may be decent, yet faithful. Men are not to be flattered in their iniquity to their ruin, but, in love to their ſouls, miniſters ſhould cry aloud, and plainly remonſtrate to ſinners, hardened in their way,

the

the whole of their wickedneſs, with a view to awaken and convince them, that obtaining mercy to believe on Jeſus they may be ſaved. He that lives after the fleſh, under any form of religion, may be pleaſed with the miniſter who diſturbs not his courſe; but, in the day of judgment, he will not look on that man as his friend, who hath covered his ſin and ſoothed him to the loſs of his ſoul. Is any man tempted, through fear or private advantage, to connive at tranſgreſſors, let him conſider the heavy charge that will lie on every unfaithful teacher, when thoſe who have deceived themſelves under him are finally condemned, and conſigned to the everlaſting fire prepared for the devil and his angels!

THESE notes on the apoſtle's remonſtrance to the Jews deſerve our ſerious attention. The greateſt miracles are inſufficient to convince the unbeliever; his prejudices are not to be removed, by any kind or degree of evidence whatever, ſo that objective grace or mere moral ſuaſion will never convert him; yet the condemnation of them who obey not the goſpel, will be in proportion to the evidence afforded them: It alſo appears, that the luſts of men are wonderfully overruled by infinite and adorable wiſdom, to bring about the purpoſe of God, whoſe holy and unchangeable decrees, though they infallibly inſure the event of what is determined, perfectly conſiſts with man's free agency. A tranſgreſſor therefore is juſtly charged with the evil he commits, however foreknown to the Almighty, and ſettled in his immutable counſel, ſeeing his action is free: It is further to be remarked, that men are

accountable,

accountable, not only for the evil which they themſelves do, but likewiſe for every wicked act performed by others at their inſtigation; and finally, from this example, miniſters of the word, are led to conſider, that it becomes them to treat their audience with every kind of reſpect due to their character, and, at the ſame time, on no conſideration whatever, to flatter any man in his iniquity, but freely to lay open the perverſeneſs and crimes of the guilty, with a view to their being converted and ſaved.

And now, my dear Reader, art thou not aſtoniſhed at the popular prejudice againſt the doctrine of predeſtination? At this many ſtumble through unhappy miſtakes, and ſee not the conſequence; but conſider the current of ſcripture, and is it not ſtrange that any perſon, above the character of a Deiſt, ſhould be offended at a doctrine ſo well ſupported by divine revelation? And how can a man read and credit what is declared on the the death of Chriſt, and with reaſon reject it? I ſuppoſe ſome, who are ſo unhappy as not to endure this clear and fundamental truth, would ſtartle, if it ſhould be aſſerted that it becomes *them* only to blaſpheme it, who would exclude the throne of the Almighty from under the heavens; yet the obſervation is juſt, for predeſtination is the ground of providence. If the decrees of God exiſt not, or his counſel ſhould fail, his government in the world would be at an end.

And what ſhall the end be of them that obey not the goſpel of God? Wo be to him who finally rejects the Lord Jeſus Chriſt! If Jeſus of Nazareth was approved

proved of God to be the Saviour of the world, moſt certainly God will diſapprove and caſt away the man who believes not on him. He that deſpiſeth this glorious Saviour, rejecteth the counſel of God to the loſs of life everlaſting, and to the eternal ruin of his immortal ſoul. O careleſs ſinner, who art tempted to content thyſelf ſhort of an intereſt in Chriſt! was it determined that Jeſus ſhould be delivered, and by wicked hands crucified and ſlain? It is no leſs the determinate counſel of God, that the man ſhall be delivered into the hands of the judge, and be puniſhed with everlaſting deſtruction, who is found an unbeliever in the day of the Lord. Think not that Jeruſalem-ſinners alone were obnoxious to the vengeance of heaven becauſe of unbelief; for "except you "repent, you ſhall likewiſe periſh." You are not guilty with the men of Judea, or like them chargeable with the blood-ſhedding of Jeſus; but is not your unbelief as hainous as theirs? Yea, and more ſo, if, as we have ſeen, the condemnation of unbelievers will be meaſured by the evidence offered them. Since our Saviour was crucified he is riſen from the dead, and hath ſent down the Spirit of promiſe from the Father; and in token of his power at the right-hand of God, his goſpel hath taken a marvellous ſpread in the world; which, with the ruin and diſperſion of the Jews, and the appearance of antichriſt, events clearly foretold by Chriſt and his apoſtles, adds greatly to the evidence given of Jeſus, for they amount to a ſtronger proof of his power and glory than even all the miracles performed in the midſt of Jeruſalem conſidered by themſelves: So that unbelievers, in the preſent day, reſiſt,

or

or neglect ſtronger evidence of the Meſſiah, than the men of Judea themſelves; and ſhall not their guilt exceed in proportion? It is an alarming conſideration! Unbelief in them who crucified our Lord, was leſs aggravating than it is in thoſe who now believe not, and it will be moretolerable for the men, of that generation who rejected the only Saviour, than for thee, O Reader! if thou art diſobedient. Take heed then that thou fall not into this ſore condemnation!

But I hope my addreſs is to one that has embraced the goſpel. And haſt thou, my Friend, received Chriſt Jeſus the Lord, and ſubmitted thyſelf unto him? Adore diſtinguiſhing grace. The beſt of means, or the moſt able inſtrument, are incapable of producing this faith which is unto ſalvation; much leſs is it owing to any previous good diſpoſition in thyſelf that thou haſt obeyed. Be not offended when I ſay, the Jews were not more averſe to Jeſus of Nazareth than thy heart, through pride and unbelief, was naturally ſet againſt the righteouſneſs of God in him. Since "the carnal mind is "enmity againſt God," where is the man who can ſay, that left under the ſame prejudices and temptations with them who crucified his Son, he ſhould not have been guilty of his blood? Therefore boaſt not, but remember thou art indebted to grace, and let God have the glory. Shun the appearance of thoſe apoſtacies, whereby ſome, who, after a ſpecious ſhew of chriſtianity, "have cruified to themſelves the Son of "God afreſh, and put him to an open ſhame;" and ſtudy to ſhew that thou art not of them who draw back

back unto perdition, but of them which believe to the ſaving of the ſoul.

And ſhould not this remonſtrance of the apoſtle to the Jews in Jeruſalem, reſpecting the teſtimony of God unto Jeſus his Son, embolden thee, O believer! under thy profeſſion of his name? What folly and madneſs muſt have been imputed to Peter, thus openly in the city where our Lord was crucified, to call thoſe very men whom he charged with his blood, to witneſs the wonders by which he was approved of God in their ſight, could the fact have been denied! Yet we ſee he did thus appeal, even to his murderers, and no one gainſayed: Yea, ſo evident was the truth, that, as we afterward find, thouſands were convinced and brought to the obedience of faith; but was this morally poſſible had they queſtioned the evidence referred to? How confirming then is this to the chriſtian! Hear ye captious Infidels, who deſpiſe the Lord's Chriſt! If God did bear witneſs unto him by evident miracles, no doubt he is the Meſſiah; and, admitting the truth of the hiſtory, which cannot with reaſon be refuſed, we are as certain that theſe real and great miracles were indeed done by Jeſus, as if our own eyes had ſeen him perform them. Bluſh then, ye Deiſts, and repent; but let the faithful bleſs God and rejoice, and not be aſhamed of their hope.

From the example before us there alſo ariſeth comfort to the poor and afflicted, who truſt in the name of the Lord. Art thou ſmall and deſpiſed, look unto Jeſus; behold he was deſpiſed of men, but honored of God!

God! It appears from the caſe of our Redeemer himſelf, that no contempt in life, or aggravating circumſtances in death, will impeach the character of the righteous, or leſſen them in the eyes of their heavenly Father. Art thou trampled upon and reviled? See in thy Lord, O believer! a man may be low in this world, and little eſteemed, yea he may be treated as the offſcouring of all things, under the viſible tokens of a divine approbation: but hath the man any reaſon to fear or to be aſhamed, however obſcure and rejected by others, who hath a witneſs from above, and is exalted in the favor of the Almighty? Chriſtian, this is thy lot; wait on thy Redeemer, and be of good courage, and think it not ſtrange that thou art partaker of his ſufferings: Fear not, he will ſhortly bring forth thy righteouſneſs as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.

In one word, What *then* remains, but that every man ſee to it, that he is accepted of God? This can be attained alone in Chriſt Jeſus, whom the Father approved by a variety of miracles, wonders and ſigns, his enemies themſelves being judges, and who was delivered, according to the decree of heaven, to be crucified and ſlain, "that he might put away ſin by the "ſacrifice of himſelf." Wilt thou, my dear Reader, be happy? Truſt in this Saviour: Bleſſed is the man who is waſhed from his ſins in his blood!

LECTURE III.

The reſurrection of Chriſt, by whom. What is implied in looſening the bands of death.

THE manifeſt deſign of the apoſtle in imputing to the Jews the blood of our Saviour, in a perverſe oppoſition to the teſtimony of God, was to awaken them to repentance, that they might believe and be ſaved; and accordingly, as a further means of conviction, he proceeds to ſhew, that this ſame Jeſus, whom they had crucified, was riſen again from the dead. This glorious and important event, on which depends our hope in Chriſt, Peter declares with a freedom becoming a man who had ſeen with his eyes, had looked upon, and whoſe hands had handled of the Word of life: he declares it on his own teſtimony, with the reſt of the apoſtles, who were all preſent, ver. 32. and with a boldneſs which ſhews that he feared no contradiction, even from the Jews themſelves. And is not this a proof that the reſurrection of Jeſus was in fact believed by the inhabitants of Jeruſalem, notwithſtanding the abſurd ſtory by which their leaders had ſhamefully attempted to deceive them? The account Peter gives of this wonderful and intereſting fact runs in theſe words, "Whom "God hath raiſed up, having looſed the pains of

" death, becauſe it was not poſſible that he ſhould be " holden of it," Acts ii. 24. They contain the author of our Saviour's reſurrection, who is God; a periphraſe of this divine act, " having looſed the bands of " death;" and a remark by which this bleſſed truth ſtands confirmed; " becauſe it was not poſſible that " he ſhould be holden of it."

THESE particulars will lead us into the ſublime myſteries of the goſpel; in attending to which I ſhall purſue the following inquiries, namely, Who is that divine perſon unto whom the reſurrection of Jeſus is aſcribed in this place? what is implied in his looſening the bands of death? and in what reſpects it was impoſſible that he ſhould be holden by it? And,

Firſt, THIS adorable and important event is aſcribed to God. The reſurrection of the dead is a ſupernatural work, but it is not impoſſible. The Gentiles indeed, who were without a written law, diſcerned not this truth; they were therefore without this hope in the world. Death was not in the original conſtitution of things, it came in by ſin; a deliverance from its power muſt therefore ariſe from the ſovereign will of the offended Majeſty of heaven, who might juſtly have held apoſtate man in the bands of eternal death. So that the knowledge of this truth depends on divine revelation: And it muſt alſo be confeſſed, that to an eye of ſenſe there are unſurmountable difficulties in the reſurrection of the dead. If we view a corpſe, there is nothing in the nature of the object adapted or diſpoſed

diſpoſed to revive, nor is there any created power that is able to raiſe it again.

NEVERTHELESS, the very heathen would be without excuſe, who ſhould ſay that it is not in the power of God to quicken the dead. Thus Paul reaſons with Agrippa, "Why ſhould it be thought a thing incre-" dible with you that God ſhould raiſe the dead?" That man's notion of a Deity muſt be exceeding low and abſurd who can queſtion the poſſibility of a reſurrection with God; it implies no contradiction, nor is it the leaſt unworthy the divine Being to effect it. To the Almighty, whoſe power and knowledge are infinite, it ſurely cannot be impoſſible; nor is raiſing the dead inconſiſtent with his juſtice, goodneſs and truth, or with any of his adorable perfections*. Bleſſed be his name, life and immortality are brought to light through the goſpel! It is eſſential to the faith of God's elect to give him the glory of raiſing the dead. Thus Abraham our Father, when he offered up Iſaac his ſon, Rom. iv. 17. This was a noble inſtance of faith, it being before any

* The immediate and viſible conſequence of natural death on its ſubject, which is the body, whereof we have daily ocular demonſtration, may juſtly rebuke the unbeliever. Who, that ſurveys the human frame in a living and healthful ſtate, could diſcern or imagine that this curious tabernacle of fleſh, with all its members and powers, was formed of the ground? This indeed is the doctrine of the Bible; but it is no leſs myſterious and incredible to an eye of ſenſe and to unaſſiſted reaſon, than the reſurrection itſelf. Men, who ſet up their underſtanding againſt the teſtimony of God, cannot but own that the natural body is principled in the duſt, it being viſible to all: But why then do they deny a true and proper reſurrection of this body from the ſtate of the dead, no leſs plainly revealed, merely becauſe the manner is not to be deſcribed, and thereby deſtroy the foundation of the goſpel?

example of a reſurrection. Indeed Enoch was tranſlated, which might be an hint to the church that the power of death would actually be deſtroyed by the ſeed of the woman, but as yet no man had been raiſed from the dead: And may it not with reaſon be concluded, that the father of the faithful, who believed that the dead might be raiſed, who ſaw Chriſt's day and was glad, John viii. 56. was animated in his obedience from a believing proſpect of the Meſſiah's future reſurrection?

HOWEVER, Chriſt is riſen, and God raiſed him up. But who is intended? The reſurrection of the dead is indifferently aſcribed to Father, Son and Holy Ghoſt: and accordingly the raiſing up the body of Chriſt is mentioned as his own act. "Chriſt both died and roſe," ſaith the apoſtle, Rom. xiv. 9. And again, 1 Cor. xv. 4. "He roſe again the third day;" and indeed he aſſumes it to himſelf, John ii. 19. "In three days I "will raiſe it up;" meaning, as the ſacred hiſtorian declares, "the temple of his body." Thus the Son, who quickeneth whom he will, laid down his life, and alſo took it up again. Nevertheleſs the ſcriptures ſhew that the divine Spirit is the agent in the reſurrection; it is he that quickeneth from ſin and the grave; and by him, as the immediate efficient cauſe, both the body of Chriſt and thoſe of his ſaints are revived. "If the "Spirit of him that raiſed up Jeſus from the dead "dwell in you, he that raiſed up Chriſt from the dead "ſhall alſo quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit "that dwelleth in you," Rom. viii. 11. And in chap. i. 4. he is ſaid to be declared "to be the Son of God with "power

" power, according to the Spirit of holineſs, by the re-
" ſurrection from the dead." So that this glorious event is aſcribed to the Holy Ghoſt. But in the œconomy of ſalvation, both the Son and the Spirit act in office under the Father; who is generally deſigned in the goſpel where God is uſed diſtinct from the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and it is obvious that the Father is here intended; it was the Father, whom David refers to, that was ſworn to raiſe up Chriſt to ſit on his throne, to whom he aſcended, and at whoſe right hand Jeſus is now exalted with power: And that this is the divine Perſon referred to, appears from the current of ſcripture, to whom alſo is aſcribed the reſurrection of the dead, and the raiſing of Jeſus. The Father raiſeth the dead at his pleaſure, John v. 21. And in Rom. vi. 4. we are told, " that
" Chriſt was raiſed by the glory of the Father." And again, Eph. i. 19, 20. it is declared, that " the Father
" of glory wrought in Chriſt, according to the work-
" ing of his mighty power, when he raiſed him from the
" dead." This is a certain fact of the utmoſt importance, that the hand of the Father was ſeen in the reſurrection of his Son; an article of faith which lies at the foundation of our hope in the blood of Jeſus, and enters deeply into the myſtery of Chriſt, as will appear from the next enquiry, to which I proceed.

Secondly, WHAT is implied in God's having looſed the pains of death? This in general is a periphraſe of Chriſt's reſurrection, or at leaſt contained in it. And here I cannot fall in with thoſe, who, as I humbly apprehend, have inadvertently given into a myſtical ſenſe, and applied it to the agonies endured by our

Redeemer; and accordingly have taken occaſion from this paſſage to expatiate on the ſpiritual ſufferings of Jeſus, which are ſtiled "the travail of his ſoul."

It is far from being agreeable to differ from perſons of ſuperior character and abilities, nor would I by any means diſcourage the juſt application of a ſingle paſſage to the ſorrows of our Saviour; but whether it is proper to ſay, that God, who inflicted the puniſhment of ſin, delivered him, our Surety, from the pains which were upon him, may be decently queſtioned. The divine Father ceaſed not to afflict him till he had poured out his ſoul and yielded up the ghoſt: And his not being the ſubject of eternal death, was in no degree owing to any favor ſhewn him by his judge, who in this righteous and awful tranſaction "ſpared not his own Son;" and ſince he made ample ſatisfaction to juſtice for our ſins, and trampled over his enemies in his croſs, may it not rather be aſſerted, that, like Sampſon, by his death he delivered himſelf from the bonds he was under? However, to apply this ſentence unto our Lord's deliverance from dolorous ſufferings, either inward or outward, is intirely againſt the ſcope of the place. Peter is evidently treating on the true and proper reſurrection of Jeſus, agreeable to his quotation out of the Pſalms, which relates to the raiſing up the body of Chriſt from the grave; this he urges in proof of his being the Meſſiah: So that to take death here in a figurative ſenſe, and a diſſolution of its pains of a deliverance from ſpiritual ſorrow, is to depart from the ſubject in hand. The apoſtle had no view to ſenſible pains of any kind whatever; from all theſe the Redeemer was certainly releaſed

releaſed the moment he expired, but the pains of death, ſpoken of in this paſſage, were evidently looſened at his reſurrection.

THERE is another paraphraſe I cannot approve: having looſed the bands under which he lay, i. e. ſay ſome, 'when the pains of death had done their work upon 'him;' but ſenſible grief is not the intention of the place, nor is the idea eſſential to the word rendered pains. Death is a ſtate of confinement in which the ſubject is held or tied faſt as with bands; and in 1 Kings xx. 31. the expreſſion is uſed for cords or ropes, with which captives are bound; and ſome critics note, that the alluſion is to cruel creditors, who will be ſure to tie their debtors faſt, which agrees with Prov. xx. 16. where the ſame word is rendered a pledge, which we know is held faſt till redeemed with a price.

Now he that underſtands the myſtery of Chriſt in his death, will ſee the term pains in this view, exactly correſponds with the circumſtances of Jeſus when he became obedient to the death of the croſs. Was he not taken in judgment for his people's tranſgreſſions, and bound as their Surety? Our debts were upon him, juſtice ſeized him, and he died as a criminal! And ſurely he that was thus caſt under the power of death, when delivered therefrom, which is the thing recited, may well be ſaid to have his pains or bonds looſed. Thus our Redeemer lay in the grave for a ſeaſon, while his ſoul was rejoicing in paradiſe; not that I apprehend he was now ſuffering the penalty of the law, which was inflicted

and fulfilled in his death; "but having, in the death "of the croſs, put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf," his body was thus laid under the pains or confinement of the grave, in order to an open and glorious releaſe, whereby a public and undeniable proof was given of his having made a righteous and honorable peace by his blood.

THIS opens to our view the importance of what is declared, namely, that God, i. e. as we have ſeen, God, even the Father, raiſed up Jeſus: He is that divine perſon who laid our iniquity on Chriſt, in conſequence of his voluntary ſubſtitution in our ſtead in the covenant of redemption. The Father acted as judge and rector in his demand of ſatisfaction to law and juſtice for our offences; he ſtretched forth his omnipotent avenging arm, and his ſword awoke againſt our heavy-laden Surety, and ſlew him. Thus the Father brought the Lord Jeſus under the power of death: His bringing him again from the dead is an act of the higheſt conſequence, and full of encouragement to the faith and joy of his people. O what a comfortable and glorious ſight is this? Chriſtian, behold God raiſed up Jeſus! See the Father as judge, who had juſtly bound him as thy Surety, releaſe him. The righteous and ſin-hating God, who confined thy Bondſman, and required at his hands whatever was due unto thee as a ſinner, in order to thy redemption from the curſe of the law; lo, this ſame divine perſon ſets him at liberty! Thus glorioufly was thy Redeemer delivered from his confinement in the grave, into which he was caſt for thy ſins! Was it to the honor of the apoſtles, when falſly impriſoned at Philippi,

Philippi, to be fetched out by the magiſtrates themſelves, and thereby declared to be innocent, Acts xvi. 39. What glory muſt ariſe on thy Saviour, O chriſtian, when he was brought again from the dead by the righteous Father himſelf, after he had made ſatisfaction to juſtice! and how well grounded thy hope in him!

THIS is the beauty of our Lord's reſurrection. We are to conſider, that it is not merely Chriſt's being raiſed from the dead, or ſimply that God raiſed him up; the goſpel of this intereſting event lieth in this, namely, that the Father, who, as judge, had laid the Redeemer under the power of death for our ſins, did, under the ſame righteous character, actually and voluntarily releaſe him. This is goſpel indeed! the glory of which, no doubt, the angels beheld with reverence and joy: and ſhould it not fill us, who truſt in this Jeſus, with triumph? But of this more hereafter; we have ſomething ſtill further to excite our admiration and hope. It is declared, "that it was not poſſible that he ſhould "be holden of the bands of death:" So that the body of our Saviour could not be detained in the grave; he muſt be diſcharged, nor could any thing hinder it. This is a glorious truth! a truth which reflects unſpeakable honor on Jeſus who was ſlain, and muſt yield a proportionable ſatisfaction to his people, who are redeemed with his blood, and truſt him for life. And this brings,

Thirdly, To ſhew the impoſſibility of Jeſus being held under the power of death and the grave. Now, on reflection,

reflection, it will appear that it was impoſſible in the following reſpects: As,

I. It was *naturally* impoſſible, both on account of his deity, and the victory he had obtained by the blood of his croſs. In order to clear up this point, we are to conſider whoſe body it was that lay in the grave from which it was raiſed: It was the body of him who is the Son of God. To this conſideration, the term uſed in the paſſage directs us. The apoſtle doth not ſay, becauſe it was not poſſible that *it*, but that *he* ſhould be holden; thereby leading our thoughts to that divine perſon who took this fleſh into union with himſelf. This "great myſtery of godlineſs, God manifeſt in the "fleſh," runs through every branch of the goſpel, and lies at the foundation of the truth we are upon. Before this body was conceived in the womb of the virgin, it was declared by the angel, "That holy thing ſhould "be called the Son of God," Luke i. 35. Now this holy thing, I apprehend, chiefly intends the natnral body of Chriſt; and this is ſo called, becauſe being an eſſential part of his whole human nature, it is united with deity in the perſon of the Redeemer, who is God's own Son, equal with the Father: For this reaſon the body of Jeſus continued under the ſame divine character when it lay entombed in the earth; and accordingly it is ſaid, Rom. i. 4. that he was "declared to be the "Son of God with power, by the reſurrection from "the dead." This ineffable union of the human with the divine nature in the perſon of the Redeemer, having taken place by the counſel of God, ſubſiſts for ever:

ever: What could diſſolve it? If any thing, the ſufferrings of Chriſt muſt cauſe the ſeparation; but this cannot be ſuppoſed, ſeeing this body was prepared and aſſumed by the Son of God, that he might therein ſuffer and die, and ſo "become a ſacrifice for ſin," Heb. x. 5. If any period could be pointed out in which this union was diſſolved, our hope in Chriſt would be loſt, ſince the infinite merit of his obedience and blood as a ſatisfaction to juſtice, on which we depend, reſults from his deity; but thanks be to God, we know, that the man Chriſt Jeſus was truly his Son when he expired on the croſs; nor could any change in his fleſh, no not by death itſelf, in the leaſt affect, much leſs deſtroy a union which is ſpiritual and divine; and therefore far above the reach of any natural cauſe. The condition of our Saviour, while in the ſtate of the dead, was like that of his brethren deceaſed; his ſoul and body were ſeparate for a ſeaſon, but neither body nor ſoul from the divine nature in the perſon of the Son: this union ſubſiſted through every change, and will be eternal. And was it poſſible that this body, thus united in the perſon of the Mediator unto Deity itſelf, ſhould be finally held in the grave? Could not the Son of God have riſen at his pleaſure? How then could he be a moment confined againſt his own will? We may therefore be certain, that the pains of death, which God looſed when he raiſed up Jeſus, could not detain him.

As it was naturally impoſſible that Jeſus ſhould be held under death on account of his divine nature; this likewiſe appears from his glorious victory over ſatan and death

death on the croſs. We are told, that "through death "he deſtroyed him that had the power of death, that is, "the devil." Heb. ii. 14. And again, "He ſpoiled princi- "palities and powers, and made a ſhew of them openly, "triumphing over them in it," Col. ii. 15. If Jeſus by himſelf, through the blood of his croſs, deſtroyed the power of ſatan, and conſequently triumphed over death and the grave, by removing the guilt of ſin, how is it poſſible that the pains of death ſhould confine him? It cannot be imagined that an enemy, however terrible or deſtructive to others, ſhould be able to keep under that perſon by whom he is taken and deſtroyed: Shall the vanquiſhed detain his conqueror, or bind him at his pleaſure? Who can ſuppoſe it? But thy Saviour, O chriſtian, obtained a victory over death and hell; it was therefore not poſſible, in the nature of things, that they ſhould detain him. Thus it was naturally impoſſible that Chriſt ſhould be held in the grave, both on account of his glory and power as a divine perſon, and alſo as the mighty conqueror of death and the devil, who had gained a dominion, through the curſe of the law, over the guilty race of apoſtate Adam. Either of theſe conſiderations apart, and much more when united, abundantly prove that Jeſus could not be held by conſtraint under the power of death; no, not a moment. I do not deny that the Redeemer's lying in the grave for a ſeaſon is a point of his humiliation, but rather think it was in reſpect of his body; yet this may be ſoberly affirmed, that our Saviour's continuance in the ſtate of the dead, after he had made ſatisfaction for ſin, and thereby deſtroyed the power of death, was

voluntary,

voluntary, and ſubmitted unto for ends of his glory. Again,

II. It was *morally* impoſſible that Jeſus ſhould be detained in the grave, in reſpect of the divine decrees, the prophecy of ſcripture, and the end for which he was delivered unto death. That the reſurrection of Chriſt was determined beforehand, will ſcarcely be doubted: It was no leſs the ſettled counſel and foreknowledge of God, that Jeſus ſhould be raiſed from the dead, than that he ſhould be crucified and ſlain. Hence our Lord ſpeaks of taking up, as well as of laying down his life at the commandment of the Father, John x. 18. And, indeed, this is included in that glory of which the Spirit teſtified in the prophets, and which was ſpoken of by them from the beginning: So that the raiſing up Chriſt was predetermined in the counſel of heaven, ſince prophecy is no other than a revelation of the divine decrees. But again, Theſe prophecies themſelves ſhew it morally impoſſible that the body of Chriſt ſhould be holden by death. The veracity of God is engaged for the accompliſhment of his word; it is therefore an undeniable maxim, that the ſcripture cannot be broken, but they contain the promiſe of the Father to raiſe up his Son: and this is the very thing which Peter inſiſts on, namely, that God had ſworn to raiſe up Chriſt and ſet him on the throne of David, which could not be accompliſhed without his reſurrection from the dead; and accordingly he ſhews the Jews that the Pſalmiſt ſpake of this in the prophecy quoted, ver. 25. and following: So that by the connection of the diſcourſe and argument of the apoſtle, he more

eſpecially

eſpecially intends, by its being impoſſible, this moral impoſſibility ariſing from the faithfulneſs of God to his word, in which he had declared he would raiſe up Jeſus. As Chriſt muſt ſuffer and die, in like-manner there was a neceſſity for his riſing again from the dead, for this reaſon among others, that the ſcripture might be fulfilled, it being impoſſible that the word of the Almighty ſhould fail. And this moral impoſſibility of detaining our Saviour under death, is ſtill further confirmed by the deſign of the Father in delivering up his Son to ſuffer and die, namely, that his people might live through him, 1 John iv. 9. The deſign of God in delivering up his Son could not be fruſtrated; and this was to deliver his adopted ſons from death and hell, and to bring them to glory, Heb. ii. 10. But how could this come to paſs if the Saviour himſelf had continued in the grave? Had Chriſt our Surety been held in theſe bands, we could not have been juſtified in him; ſo argues the apoſtle, "If Chriſt be not raiſed, your faith "is vain; ye are yet in your ſins," 1 Cor. xv. 17. But bleſſed be God, he "whowas delivered for our "offences, was raiſed again for our juſtification," Rom. iv. 25. And further,

III. I may ſay it was *legally* impoſſible that our Lord ſhould be held in theſe bands, on account of the ſatisfaction he had made to the juſtice of God. Having become the voluntary ſubſtitute of ſinners, in the covenant of redemption, he died by the hand of the Father, under the righteous imputation of all their iniquity; and in this his obedience unto death, he fully anſwered the demands that were upon him, "for he put away

"ſin

"ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf," Heb. xi. 26. This ſatisfaction, which appears from his being releaſed, entitled him to a deliverance. It would have been unrighteous to have continued our Surety in priſon, who had fully diſcharged our debts, yea and made a glorious reparation to the honor of the law, under which he was held in our ſtead. But is there any unrighteouſneſs with God? It was therefore not poſſible, becauſe it was unlawful. With God all things are poſſible that agree with the divine perfections: It is therefore poſſible, however wonderful, that God ſhould raiſe the dead, for ends of juſtice or mercy, or for a diſplay of his power; but for the divine Father to hold the innocent as guilty, or to detain our Surety in the grave, into which he was caſt for our ſins, after he had completely atoned them, would be to contradict his eſſential righteouſneſs, and to impeach his character as a judge; Jeſus having finiſhed his work, and made a full end of ſin, juſtice required that he ſhould be ſet free, it not being equitable for that perſon to be held under death who had merited life, or to have with-held the victorious Captain of our ſalvation from the reward of his ſufferings. Thus it was naturally, morally and legally impoſſible that the Son of God ſhould be holden by his bands, which were looſed by the Father when he raiſed him up.

How glorious then is the tomb of a crucified Saviour! Look, O believer! into this grave; conſider who it contains, and the end for which it is there! It is the body of him who is able to riſe at his pleaſure. O aſtoniſhing ſight! here lies the Conqueror for a ſeaſon

ſon in the arms of his captive, and the Lamb in the jaws of the lion, unhurt, for the deſtroyer cannot conſume him! The grave of thy Redeemer, O chriſtian! is full of myſtery and grandeur. Here lies the man in whom no ſin was found, though death is alone the wages of ſin! yea here lies dead the Surety, who, in the ranſom he hath given, had delivered his people from the ſting of death, and condemned the laſt enemy to a final deſtruction; for "death itſelf ſhall be "caſt into the lake of fire and ſwallowed up in victory." This is he that ſaid, "O death I will be thy plague, "O grave I will be thy deſtruction!" And "who, "through death, had deſtroyed him that had the pow-"er of death, which is the devil." "He laid down "his life that he might take it up again:" and lies thus confined, not by conſtraint, but willingly, while, according to the ſettlement in the counſel of peace, in order to his being openly raiſed by the glory of the Father, to his immortal honor, and the joy of his ſaints. This, this truly was lying in ſtate; not like the gods or princes of the earth, in a vain pomp of funeral decoration over their corpſe, already corrupted, to be gazed at by a thoughtleſs multitude of ſurviving mortals, and then covered in the earth till the reſurrection of the dead: No; the Prince of life lies in death like himſelf, that juſtice having looſed his bands he may ariſe. He accordingly roſe, and as it were ſhook off his duſt and aſcended to his throne, to be viewed with adoration and praiſe by the heavenly hoſt, who continually aſcribe to him everlaſting dominion and glory.

And was Jeſus raiſed up by God, it being not poſſible that he ſhould be holden by death? then wo be to them who reſiſt or deſpiſe him! Nothing can be more dreadful for unbelievers and impenitent ſinners, than the deliverance of Chriſt from the grave. The reſurrection of Jeſus proves the righteouſneſs of God, and judgment to come, Acts xviii. 31. By this he is procláimed Lord of all, and him by whom God will judge the world in righteouſneſs. Reader, if thou haſt not ſubmitted to the Saviour, I beſeech thee to conſider that he is exalted at the right-hand of the Father, till all his enemies are ſubdued. Chriſt is riſen; what then muſt become of the man who doth not obey him? The evidences of his reſurrection abound, as will hereafter be ſhewn, yet he is preached in vain to men dead in ſins. Well ſaid our Lord, "They will not believe though one roſe from the dead." We have ample external proof that Chriſt is riſen, yet alas how few to whom the goſpel is preached believe on his name! But know, thou careleſs hearer, that this ſame Jeſus, whom God hath raiſed up a Saviour, is appointed his Judge. And as it was not poſſible, for the reaſons aſſigned, that the pains of death ſhould hold him, in like manner, it ſhall not be poſſible for the heavens to detain him, when the ſet day is come; then ſhall he be "revealed in flaming fire, and take "vengeance on them who know not God, and obey "not his goſpel, 2 Theſſ. i. 8. And be perſuaded, that from the exquiſite pains of this death, which he will inflict, thou ſhalt never be looſed, if thou art caſt in judgment, for they who fall into the hands of this living

God, as the avenger of ſin, will ſurely "be puniſhed "with everlaſting deſtruction from his preſence and "from the glory of his power," ver. 9. O then, I beſeech thee, deceive not thyſelf, but take warning, and may the Lord convince thee, that, repenting of thy ſins, thou mayeſt flee to this only Saviour, who hath delivered us from wrath to come!

BUT, with what ſatisfaction and joy may you, my dear friends, who truſt in the Redeemer, reflect on his glorious releaſe from the grave! to you this grand event is no leſs intereſting than wonderful. Behold, O chriſtian, thy Surety raiſed and diſcharged by the ſame hand which bound him for thy ſins! Herein thou art juſtified, and here is a pledge of thine own reſurrection. What a ground of triumph is this! "Who "ſhall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It "is God that juſtifieth." He juſtified thy Saviour, believer, and it is God that juſtifieth thee in him; thou art therefore righteouſly acquitted. And with reſpect to judgment to come; haſt thou any thing to fear? "Who is he that condemneth? It is Chriſt that "died, yea rather that is riſen again." Unſhaken is thy confidence, O man, in the blood of Chriſt for the remiſſion of ſins. With boldneſs come to thy heavenly Father, in the name of this Jeſus he hath himſelf raiſed up; and be aſſured that the end of thy faith will be thy complete and eternal ſalvation. If Chriſt is riſen, and it was not poſſible that he ſhould be holden, no man ſhall periſh for whom Chriſt died, neither can death have final dominion over him. Jeſus is riſen, and become the firſt-fruits of them that ſleep in him.

Hence

Hence, ſays he to his diſciples, "Becauſe I live, ye "ſhall live alſo," John xiv. 19. The members of a living head muſt a ſhort ſeaſon, for valuable ends, fall into a ſtate of natural death, but they ſhall ſurely revive. May this ſtrengthen thy faith, enliven thy hope, and increaſe thy joy in the Lord. Finally, O chriſtian, is there not the higheſt reaſon for thee to give thanks to the Father? Behold his faithfulneſs, juſtice, power and love, illuſtriouſly diſplayed in raiſing up thy Saviour; and conſider the infinite obligations thou art under to him, that this important and intereſting fact ſtands confirmed by ſo many credible teſtimonies. But of this in the following lecture.

LECTURE IV.

What to be underſtood by a witneſs. Who are witneſſes of our Lord's reſurrection. Their credibility.

THE natural prejudice againſt a reſurrection in general, and the particular ſtreſs laid in the goſpel on the raiſing up Chriſt, requires the moſt ample and undeniable proof of that glorious and important event; and, bleſſed be God, this is not wanting. He hath abounded in every kind of evidence, which the nature of the thing and the circumſtances of the caſe will admit, among which the teſtimony of his diſciples hath a principal place, and is now to be conſidered.

THE apoſtles having declared, Acts xi. 24. that God had raiſed up Jeſus of Nazareth, and pointed out the neceſſity of his reſurrection, to the glory of his name, proceeds to ſhew, from the prophecy of David, that thus it was determined, ver. 25—31. And in ver. 32, repeats his aſſertion with a punctuality and boldneſs becoming a man who could prove what he ſaid, "This Jeſus hath God raiſed up." In evidence of this he produces the teſtimony of many, including his own; "whereof, ſaith he, we are all witneſſes." The like declaration is made on another occaſion, chap. iii. 14. And likewiſe again, before the high-prieſt and Sanhedrim, Peter boldly declares, that he and others were his, i. e. God's witneſſes of theſe things, meaning among the reſt that of the reſurrection of Jeſus that was ſlain. In attending to this article it may be uſeful to ſtate the notion of a witneſs, conſider who are deſigned by the witneſſes of Chriſt's reſurrection, and then ſhew their credibility, or rather that their teſtimony cannot with reaſon be queſtioned.

A WITNESS in the ſimple and common idea of the word, is one that beares open teſtimony to the truth; it ſignifies clearly to affirm the thing that is true. And thus it is applied to a man's profeſſion of his faith in Chriſt, by an open confeſſion of his name, and a perſonal ſubjection to him before men; in this ſenſe to confeſs is to witneſs. Hence our Lord himſelf is ſaid to witneſs a good confeſſion before Pontius Pilate, when he ſtood to the truth and denied not his character, 1 Tim. vi. 13. compared with John xviii. 37. And the word μάρτυρες, martyrs, here uſed is more particularly

cularly applied to them who, being called to it, ſeal their profeſſion with their blood. Hence Saul pleads, ſaying to the Lord, Acts xxii. 20. "And when the "blood of thy martyr Stephen was ſhed I was ſtanding "by, &c." And we read, Rev. xvii. 6. of the blood of the martyrs, i. e. according to the text, of the witneſſes of Jeſus. The ſame character is likewiſe given to the miniſters of the word, who are employed to affirm and declare the truth: thus of the prophets, who by ſpecial unction from heaven teſtified beforehand of Jeſus, it is ſaid, that they all gave witneſs to him who roſe from the dead, concerning remiſſion of ſins through faith in his blood, Acts x. 43. Hence alſo John the baptiſt, is ſaid, John i. 7. to come for a witneſs, to bear witneſs of the light, i. e. to teſtify unto Chriſt the true light; and the witneſſes mentioned, Rev. xi. 3. as ſome apprehend, ſeem rather a number of goſpel-miniſters than any two individual perſons. However our Lord was a witneſs, as he bore witneſs, to himſelf; which was no other than bearing witneſs to the truth, John viii. 18. And in the ſame ſenſe all his faithful miniſters, who teſtify and declare the truth as it is in Jeſus, may be ſtiled witneſſes of the ſame.

But this falls ſhort of the ſenſe in which Peter and others were witneſſes of our Lord's reſurrection. A witneſs properly ſpeaking is one who, being called or appointed by authority, to aſcertain any fact, gives good and ſufficient proof of the ſame; he is one that teſtifies a thing upon his own knowledge as certainly true. Such are the evidences required in relation to facts by the world in general or ſpecial ſocieties, and particu-

larly in courts of juſtice. Thus every thing by the law was to be eſtabliſhed in the mouth of two or three witneſſes, and the ſame rule is adopted under the goſpel, Deut. xvii. 6. compared with 2 Cor. xiii. 1. And it is in this ſenſe that the apoſtle declares concerning himſelf, and many others, that they were all witneſſes of the reſurrection of Jeſus. He intends nothing leſs than their being appointed of God the true and proper witneſſes of the adorable and intereſting fact, and which they accordingly teſtified upon their own knowledge, having ſeen the Lord after he was riſen, and before whom he ſaid and did ſuch things as amounted to a full demonſtration that God had indeed raiſed up this ſame Jeſus who was crucified; of which more hereafter. Thus as Peter, James and John, were eye-witneſſes of the majeſty and glory of Jeſus in his tranſfiguration on the mount, in like manner all theſe whom the apoſtle refers to and joins himſelf with, were eye and ear-witneſſes of his being riſen from the dead.

Now, who are theſe witneſſes, or from whence are they choſen? from angels? No: Indeed he was ſeen of angels after he roſe, 1 Tim. iii. 16. And we read that angels ſaid to the women, Matt. xxviii. 6. "He is not here, for he is riſen." So that we find angels waited at the ſepulchre, and report the Saviour's reſurrection; and we likewiſe are told, a glorious hoſt of theſe illuſtrious ſpirits attended our Lord when he aſcended on high, Pſalm lxviii. 17. But angels were not appointed of God, to bear witneſs to the world of his Son, that he hath raiſed him from the

the dead. Neither are theſe witneſſes taken from the body of the Jews, or from any of their rulers. Chriſt did not appear unto them after he was riſen. At this unbelievers have frequently cavilled. If Chriſt, ſay they, indeed roſe again, why did he not ſhew himſelf openly to the Jews and their rulers? It has been juſtly replied: This would not have conſiſted with the ſtate of the Jews, nor with the deſign of the witneſſes, which was not to be a teſtimony only to that nation, which was ſoon to be deſtroyed, but that all the world might know that God had raiſed up Jeſus a Saviour. The Jews, through unbelief, had rejected the Meſſiah as a people, and thereby filled up the meaſure of their ſin. Hence they were under an awful dereliction. Our Lord had ſome time before his death pronounced their doom, namely, Matt. xxiii. 38. that their houſe was left unto them deſolate*, i. e. devoted to deſtruction as the reward of their iniquity. And in the next verſe he ſolemnly declares, ſaying, "Ye ſhall not ſee me henceforth, till ye ſhall ſay, "Bleſſed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." And it doth not appear that our Lord once after addreſſed the Jews in the courſe of his miniſtry, in order to their conviction, but only warns his hearers of their approaching deſtruction, and declares the many awful ſigns that would forerun it. There is reaſon to apprehend that ſome crafty ſceptics are aware, that if in theſe circumſtances our Lord had actually appeared

* To be deſolate is ſometimes to be underſtood of being left under ſin and the puniſhment thereof. Thus in Pſalm xxxiv. 21, 22. it is ſaid that the wicked ſhall be deſolate or guilty as the word אשם ſignifies, from which they who truſt in the Lord are ſecure, being juſtified in him.

to the Jews, he had ſurely falſified his own prediction; in which caſe no doubt they would have availed themſelves againſt him, but they have not this advantage. Chriſt did not ſhew himſelf to the Jews after he was riſen, and the reaſon is plain; he had profeſſedly left them, ſo that his immediate concern with them as a body was long ſince at an end; nor was it probable that a people who had, in the hardneſs of their hearts, withſtood the evidence of ſo many miracles, and even that of his raiſing the dead, as in the inſtance of Lazarus; I ſay, it is not likely that a people, who againſt all this divine teſtimony had rejected Chriſt as an impoſtor, and as one that had a devil, would have repented and received him, upon ſeeing him after his reſurrection. However, we are to conſider that Jeſus was to be the Saviour of the world, and his reſurrection to be publiſhed in every nation under heaven. The rulers of the Jews could be no better evidence than the perſons choſen; for, as one well obſerves, 'What 'greater ſatisfaction would it have been to the world 'in general that Chriſt appeared to the Jews, or to 'the magiſtrates at Jeruſalem, than that of his ap-'pearance to his diſciples, provided their witneſs is 'credible?' Any unprejudiced perſon may ſee that the ſelected witneſs of Chriſt's own diſciples, duly qualified to give their teſtimony, was the moſt rational and convincing, and conſequently the fitteſt external evidence that the world could receive. It is therefore perverſe and manifeſt prejudice to complain that the witneſſes of our Lord's reſurrection were choſen from his own diſciples.

But to return. Neither are the witneſſes referred to every one who ſaw and converſed with the Saviour after he roſe from the dead; he was ſeen of five hundred brethren at once, 1 Cor. xv. 6. And it is at leaſt highly probable that each of his diſciples ſaw him before he aſcended; and that as they had opportunity declared his appearance unto them. But to be a witneſs of Chriſt's reſurrection includes a ſpecial commiſſion and authority, by divine appointment, to teſtify this wonderful and glorious event in the world. Thus Peter declares that they were "witneſſes choſen before "God, who did eat and drink with him after he roſe "from the dead," Acts x. 41. It was eſſential and peculiar to the character of an apoſtle to bear this teſtimony of Jeſus; and therefore when the number of the apoſtles was to be completed by the filling up the place of Judas the traitor, it is ſaid, Acts i. 21, 22. "Of theſe men which have companied with us all the "time that the Lord Jeſus went in and out among us, "beginning from the baptiſm of John, unto that ſame "day that he was taken up from us, muſt one be or-"dained to be a witneſs with us of his reſurrection." And accordingly when Saul was converted, and called to the office of an apoſtle, the Lord ſaith; "For I "have appeared unto thee for this purpoſe, to be a "miniſter and a witneſs both of the things which thou "haſt ſeen and thoſe things in the which I ſhall ap-"pear unto thee," Acts xxvi. 16. One of which was that of the reſurrection, which he not only preached, but likewiſe bare witneſs of having ſeen Jeſus Chriſt,

to which he appeals in proof of his apoſtleſhip, 1 Cor. ix. 1. And in chap. xv. after aſſerting that Chriſt roſe again the third day according to the ſcriptures, and appeared to many in teſtimony of the ſame, he declares, ver. 8. "and laſt of all he was ſeen of me alſo." So then theſe witneſſes are no other than thoſe firſt and great miniſters, the apoſtles of Chriſt, who being qualified by their own converſe with him after he was alive from the dead, were choſen and ordained before God to teſtify, by undeniable evidence, to all the world that he raiſed up Jeſus; and accordingly they went forth in his name, with ſigns and miracles attending, in proof of their miſſion from heaven.

It remains to conſider the credibility of theſe choſen witneſſes, which is by no means to be taken for granted, nor is it deſired. For though the enemies of chriſtianity have preſumed to queſtion the evidence of the diſciples, it hath largely been ſhewn by many excellent writers, and will be found on trial that their character, under the notion of a witneſs to this glorious and important event, will bear the niceſt ſcrutiny, to the abundant ſatisfaction of every impartial enquirer; nor do I know of any thing that can be added to what has already been urged on the head, the ſum of which I ſhall preſent to the reader. In general it appears that they had every qualification eſſential to a credible witneſs. They had knowledge, perſpicuity, and uprightneſs; but more particularly,

Firſt,

FIRST, they were competent judges. The thing to be proved was level to any man's capacity*. Unbelievers may attempt to raiſe difficulties and pretend great danger of being deceived in a caſe of this nature, but they have been told, and every man's reaſon will tell him, that evidence is eaſily obtained where the thing in queſtion, as in the caſe of the reſurrection, is manifeſtly an object of ſenſe. The body of Chriſt is a ſenſible object, and the apoſtles had ſenſes to diſcern that object. It has been juſtly pleaded, nor can it be modeſtly denied, that the reſurrection was to be ſupported by the evidence of ſenſe; now, as a celebrated writer obſerves, 'it requires no more ability to be a 'witneſs to a man raiſed from the dead, than a per-'fect knowledge of him before his deceaſe, and a ca-'pacity to diſtinguiſh between a dead man and a man 'alive; and what living man doth not think himſelf 'a judge in this point?' As to a pretence that the body of Jeſus was not truly and properly a body, ſeeing he often appeared to the diſciples and withdrew from them in a ſudden miraculous way, it is without any foundation, ſince at Nazareth before his death, when his body is allowed to be real, and in other places, ſee Luke iv. 30. John viii. 59. he withdrew from the midſt of the people, when in danger, in a manner no leſs wonderful. Beſides the apoſtles had undeniable teſtimony

* It is the ſubtlety of a deiſtical writer to inſinuate that the credibility of a witneſs can at moſt be only preſumed; for if it may not be certainly known, there can then be no dependence on any hiſtory, ſacred or prophane, and in conſequence the goſpel itſelf is incapable of proof. But it is hoped that the reader is not to be moved by any ſuch ſophiſtry, and that the character of the apoſtles who teſtified that Jeſus is riſen will appear undeniable.

mony concerning the reality of our Saviour's body, as appears from Luke xxvi. 39. "Handle me and ſee, "for a ſpirit hath not fleſh and bones, as ye ſee me "have."

THE knowledge theſe witneſſes had of our Lord's reſurrection depended not on occaſional or tranſitory viſits; they had ſufficient opportunity to examine his body, and to be ſatisfied it was Jeſus himſelf, which, in connexion with their capacity for judging, demands our credit. Mary Magdalen, the firſt who ſaw the Lord after he roſe, was forbid to detain him for a reaſon aſſigned, yet it doth not appear that ſhe touched not his body; however it is plain that ſhe had ſufficient proof that it was the Lord ſhe had ſeen, and accordingly makes her report, John xx. 18. And with reſpect to theſe choſen witneſſes we have already ſeen that they eat and drank with him, yea, ſaith Luke the ſacred hiſtorian, Acts i. 3. "He ſhewed himſelf "alive after his paſſion, by many infallible proofs, "being ſeen of them forty days, and ſpeaking of the "things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Thus God ſhewed his Son, whom he had raiſed openly, chap. x. 40. i. e. clearly as the ſun ſhines, in the moſt conſpicuous manner, ſo as to leave no doubt on the minds of his followers, for as the apoſtle acquaints us, 1 John i. 1. "They heard, they ſaw with their eyes; "they looked upon, and their hands handled of the "word of life." A pleoniſm or redundancy of expreſſion which implies the fulleſt opportunity for trial by their ſenſes, which, as hinted, were the proper judge of the fact. In a word, had Chriſt lived with

with his diſciples an hundred years after he roſe from the dead, they could not have obtained a more certain proof that he was riſen indeed.

In conſequence of their full ſatisfaction on ſufficient evidence that Jeſus was riſen, the apoſtles declare it without heſitation, which is another credible circumſtance; they ſpake of it boldly at Jeruſalem, as in the inſtance before us, and even before the high-prieſt and council of the Jews, Acts v. 33. Now it is not credible that they ſhould thus freely and conſtantly declare that Jeſus was alive on the ſpot where he was crucified, and among a people that had ſeen him laid in the grave, and this to the magiſtrates themſelves, who wanted not for means to detect, nor power or inclination to puniſh them, if the fact had not been notorious.

Integrity alſo is eſſential to the credit of a witneſs, and of this the diſciples had every poſſible mark. And here I might inſiſt on their morals, the miracles they wrought, their faithfulneſs in recording their own infirmities and ſins, their many and great ſufferings for the teſtimony of Jeſus, and when called to it, their ſealing this teſtimony with their blood. Theſe are more than ſufficient; and eſpecially the laſt is an undeniable proof, if proof can be had of human uprightneſs. Men corrupted with infidelity have not ſpared an attempt to ſet aſide the force of this argument, by comparing it with that of a criminal under ſentence of death, who denies the fact for which he is condemned, which hath frequently been the caſe.

But

But to this it has been juſtly replied, that 'there is 'no compariſon between a criminal denying the truth 'to ſave his life, and a perſon expoſing himſelf to ſuf-'ferings and death by atteſting a known falſhood.' And indeed, who cannot ſee that this is rather an oppoſite than a parallel caſe? The apoſtles might at any time have quitted their teſtimony, and ſaved their lives, but they reſiſted unto blood, ſtriving againſt ſin; which, joined to the wonders they performed, is ſuch evidence, that to reſiſt the ſame is to reſolve againſt believing either God or man.

THUS if we conſider that theſe witneſſes were capable of judging the matter in queſtion, the ſufficient means they had of knowing the fact, the open manner in which they declared it, and the ample proof we have of their integrity, nothing but prejudice can hinder our pronouncing them credible, and receiving their teſtimony of our Lord's reſurrection; they are certainly true wtineſſes of God who teſtified to the world that he raiſed up Chriſt.

BUT, beſides their being poſſeſſed of every qualification required in a witneſs, there are many other things which tend to corroborate their evidence, which are not to be paſſed over in ſilence. Their own incredulity, for which they ſtand juſtly reproved; their being never called in queſtion, in relation to the fact; which, together with Gamaliel's advice, Acts v. 34. and Paul's anſwer to Agrippa in the court of Cæſaria, chap. xxvi. are more than ſufficient to ſhew, that the Jews themſelves

ſelves were far from being convinced that Chriſt was not riſen. The teſtimony of unbelievers themſelves is another ſtrong circumſtance in favour of the apoſtles credibility. The ſoldiers who guarded the ſepulchre, though bribed to conceal it, at firſt, in their fear, ſcruple not to report the aſtoniſhing event. Matt. xxviii. 11. By ſome apologies of the fathers it appears that even the Roman ſenate denied not the reſurrection of Jeſus, and it is very remarkable that Joſephus the Jewiſh hiſtorian ſpeaks without heſitation, that Chriſt roſe again on the third day. But ſtill greater is the teſtimony of God by the mouth of his prophets who foretold the reſurrection of his Son; this will confirm the credibility of his witneſſes with them that believe. To this purpoſe the apoſtle pleads, Acts xxvi. 22, 23. that he ſaid "none other things than thoſe which the pro-"phets and Moſes did ſay ſhould come: That "Chriſt ſhould ſuffer, and that he ſhould be the firſt "that ſhould riſe from the dead." It certainly adds to the credit of perſons every way qualified to be witneſſes, that in what they report, however wonderful, they declare nothing but what God had foretold ſhould come to paſs. The amazing ſpread and efficacy of the goſpel might alſo be urged, and likewiſe the number of thoſe who atteſted the ſame; not one or two, but twelve; and afterward the apoſtle of the Gentiles, who once thought it became him, and therefore to his utmoſt deſtroyed the faith; ſo that he cannot be ſuppoſed to join in their teſtimony without the moſt convincing evidence; together with all the other diſciples who ſaw the riſen Saviour, beſides the witneſſes themſelves, ſo that many hundreds confirmed their report. Thus it was the wiſdom

of

of God by a great variety of circumſtances to eſtabliſh the witneſs of his choſen ſervants to the reſurrection of our Lord.

As to the popular objections of infidels, they are trifling and perverſe. Some cavil that he was not three days and three nights in the earth, as predicted, for want of admitting the known manner of reckoning the nights into the day, when we reckon by ſo many days. Three days and three nights are expreſſions equivalent to three days, or in three days. And three days incluſive take in the firſt and the laſt in the account, however ſmall a part of either is employed, which anſwers exactly to the time of our Saviour's lying in the grave. The Jews plainly underſtood the next day, which was the ſabbath, to be the ſecond day, and the pains they took to ſet a guard on that day, leſt in the night the body of Chriſt ſhould be ſtolen away, ſhews that in their account, the next, i. e. the third day was the day on which he, whom they call a deceiver, ſaid, "I will riſe again," Matt. xxvii. 63. The prediction was that he ſhould riſe again the third day, which he actually, truly, and properly did, as we learn from the teſtimony of the angels, Luke xxiv. 7. alſo from his appearance to the women, and the diſcourſe of the diſciples with him as they walked to Emmaus, "To-day, ſay "they, is the third day ſince theſe things were done," ver. 21. which was the very day on which Chriſt roſe, as appears from the context. Others deny that a reſurrection is poſſible; this is exceeding bold if not impious; it is moſt unreaſonable to doubt whether the Almighty who informed this curious veſſel

of

of duſt with a principle of life can revive it from the ſtate of the dead at his pleaſure; and, as hinted already, there is no contradiction in raiſing a dead body, nor is it in any reſpect unworthy of God to perform it; and if the dead may be raiſed, the reſurrection of Jeſus is not to be ſcrupled under a notion of its being impoſſible. In a word, the ſtory told by the Jews, of our Saviour's body being ſtole in the night by his diſciples, notwithſtanding all their precaution, is too ridiculous and abſurd to be received by any ſober unprejudiced perſon. The diſciples were at this time in the utmoſt fear and jeopardy, were themſelves diſcouraged at the death of their Lord, and had no apprehenſion of his riſing again, and therefore had no motive in themſelves to attempt the removing his body; but if they had, they were utterly incapable of performing it; could they roll away the ſtone from the ſepulchre, or do it without awaking any of the guard? but if the guard continued aſleep, how came they to know that his body was ſtolen? or if it was, that his diſciples were concerned? they neither heard nor ſaw any thing; and, as a late ingenuous writer* obſerves, 'was it ever heard ſince the world began 'that evidence was admitted to a fact that took place 'while the parties atteſting were confeſſedly aſleep?' Beſides, who in their ſenſes, on ſuch an enterprize, would have ſtayed to fold up the cloths, and lay them apart in the manner they were found by Peter and John?

* Trial of the witneſſes of the reſurrection of Jeſus, wherein moſt of the arguments mentioned in favor of the apoſtles credibility are introduced with great propriety and force.

So then it appears that this glorious and important event, the reſurrection of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, ſtands fully atteſted by proper witneſſes choſen before God, whoſe credibility is not to be queſtioned, being confirmed by every poſſible mark of truth, and againſt which every objection of the adverſary is groundleſs and vain. Unbelievers are therefore inexcuſable; their folly is manifeſt, ſince nothing can be more credible; nor was any fact in the world more abundantly proved, than that Jeſus was raiſed from the dead. May ſuch obtain mercy to repent; for ſince Chriſt is riſen, wo be to the man who ſhall be found to have denied him when he comes to judgment!

To conclude, he that believeth hath the witneſs in himſelf, and may be aſſured from his own experience that Jeſus is riſen. The efficacy of the goſpel unto ſaving faith in the heart is owing to the ſame divine power which wrought in Chriſt when God raiſed him from the dead, Eph. i. 19, 20, And the death of Jeſus is the procuring cauſe of ſuch divine operation; ſo that the faithful have an internal evidence, whereby the veracity of theſe choſen witneſſes is confirmed to themſelves. O chriſtian, thine own reſurrection from the grave of ſin is a ſure teſtimony to thee that thy Saviour is riſen! Had not thy Surety roſe from the dead thou hadſt been yet in thy ſins, but now God hath quickened thee, who wert thyſelf dead in treſpaſſes and ſins; he that died for thee is certainly alive! Under this teſtimony of the Spirit rejoice in thy hope, give glory to the Father, who raiſed up his Son, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.

LECTURE

LECTURE V.

The Holy Ghoſt a witneſs to the reſurrection of Jeſus: His teſtimony in the believer appealed to by the apoſtle, 1ſt epiſtle John, ch. v. 10. conſidered and proved.

WE have ſeen that nothing can be more credible, than the open and united teſtimony the apoſtles gave to the reſurrection of Chriſt; yet there is one objection boldly advanced, which if admitted throws a dead weight on all that can be ſaid in proof of this point, namely, the fact is ſo extraordinary, it being, ſay the objectors, contrary to the laws of nature for the dead to ariſe, that no human evidence can be ſufficient, ſince the voice of nature outweighs the utmoſt that can be ſaid againſt her. To this ſome have juſtly replied, that the ideas men form concerning nature are governed by prejudices they have received and not by reaſon: and this is at leaſt frequently the caſe. But ſurely, however above or contrary to the law of nature it may be ſuppoſed, God is able to raiſe the dead; and who can ſay that he will not? and if he doth, will any deny that the ſenſes are competent judges of the fact? Now it is aſſerted that God did raiſe up Jeſus, who ſhewed himſelf openly to his diſciples, whoſe conviction and knowledge of

their riſen Lord were inconteſtible; which, together with the uprightneſs of their character, and the manner of their teſtimony, and eſpecially as their report was confirmed by undeniable miracles which they wrought, render unbelievers without any excuſe. Nevertheleſs the credit of our Saviour's reſurrection doth not altogether reſt on human evidence: Not only the apoſtles but God alſo bare witneſs to his being raiſed up: Not to inſiſt on the teſtimony of the Father by the prophets from the foundation of the world, or that of the Son himſelf, from the throne in the heavens, Rev. i. 18. which will have their weight with them that believe, to eſtabliſh their faith in this point; it is expreſsly declared that the Holy Ghoſt alſo did witneſs with the diſciples to this intereſting event, whoſe divine teſtimony we are now to conſider. It ſtands recorded, Acts v. 32. where the apoſtle, upon declaring that he and the reſt were witneſſes that God had actually raiſed up Jeſus, and exalted him with his right-hand, adds this remarkable clauſe, "And ſo is alſo the Holy Ghoſt, whom God hath "given to them that obey him." I ſhall briefly touch on the divine perſon here ſaid to witneſs, as the apoſtles, to the reſurrection of Chriſt; the view in which he is conſidered in this paſſage; on whom he is beſtowed; and then ſhew how, or in what manner he teſtifies of this bleſſed and important event.

THE Holy Ghoſt, or Spirit, for they are the ſame, is no other than that glorious divine perſon who deſcended, as a dove, on our Lord at his baptiſm, in the relating of which the apoſtles indifferently ſtile him the

the Spirit, or the Holy Ghoſt, Matt. iii. 16. compared with Luke iii. 22. This adorable Spirit is joined with the Father and the Son, in the name into which chriſtians are baptized, under the ſame character by which he is deſcribed in the text; and it is remarkable that he is ſpoken of under this character near fourſcore times in the New-Teſtament. His proper deity and diſtinct perſonality are clearly ſet forth in the ſacred writings, and particularly in the caſe of Ananias, Acts v. 3, 4. to whom the apoſtle ſaith, "Why hath ſatan filled "thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghoſt? thou haſt not "lied unto men, but unto God." He muſt be greatly prejudiced who would attempt to evade this plain and ſtrong proof of the true divinity, and proper perſonality of the Holy Ghoſt; and the ſentence before us evinces the latter, for to bear witneſs is a perſonal act. He is ſtiled Ghoſt or Spirit, not in reſpect of his ſpiritual eſſence, which is common to each divine perſon, but neither the Father nor the Son are the Spirit; therefore this diſtinguiſhing character has regard to his perſonal ſubſiſtence; and however ſome may diſapprove it, the ancient opinion has not been ſuperceeded by a better account. The real ground of this divine character ſeems to be this, namely, the manner of his eternal proceſſion, which is by ſpiration; and accordingly in Job xxiii. 4. the Spirit of the Lord, and the breath of the Almighty are the ſame; and as for the epithet holy, it ſtands ſupported by his eſſential purity, and alſo by his being the author of holineſs in them that believe. This divine perſon, we are told, "proceedeth from the Father and the Son," which may be applied to his manner of ſubſiſtence in the

deity, as hinted already, or to his goings-forth in the execution of his office, in which he quickens, ſanctifies and comforts the hearts of the redeemed, and likewiſe is a witneſs to their eſtabliſhment and joy; and particularly as he was, and continueth to be an evidence or witneſs to the reſurrection of Jeſus.

The Holy Ghoſt is declared to be the gift of God. As Chriſt, ſo is his Spirit the gift of the Father, whoſe office and operations are needful to accompliſh the divine purpoſes in the ſalvation of ſinners. He was therefore provided in the counſel of God, for he hath choſen us through ſanctification of the Spirit. Hence the Spirit is promiſed, and hath been ſent forth in all ages, but more plentifully in theſe laſt days ſince the coming of Chriſt, in the variety of his gifts and the plenty of his grace; ſo that this is eminently a diſpenſation of the Spirit, under which the faithful have been large partakers of his power and goodneſs, whereby they obtained a freedom or boldneſs unknown in general heretofore. "For ye have not received the "Spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have re- "ceived the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father." Rom. viii. 15.

Now it is further declared, that God hath given the Holy Ghoſt to them that obey him; that is, who obey either God the Father, or his Son Jeſus Chriſt, it amounts to the ſame, for in obeying of Chriſt we obey the Father who ſent him: but in goſpel-obedience Chriſt is the more immediate object; and to obey Jeſus Chriſt is cordially to truſt him, Rom. x. 16. "They have not all obeyed the goſpel, for Eſaias "ſaith, Lord, who hath believed our report?" Hence

the

the Son is ſaid, Heb. v. 9. to have become "the au-
"thor of eternal ſalvation unto all them that obey
"him," i. e. that believe him; "for he that believeth
"and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved," Mark xvi. 16. To obey God, or Chriſt, or the goſpel, are the ſame in the language of ſcripture. The expreſſion uſed in this place literally ſignifies to ſubmit, and conveys the idea of a voluntary obedience: And it is well known that a free ſubmiſſion to Chriſt and his righteouſneſs is included in the faith of the choſen. The apoſtle repreſents the unbelief of the Jews by their not having "ſubmitted themſelves to the righteouſneſs of God," Rom. x. 3. Chriſt is exalted a Prince and a Saviour; he is preached Lord and Chriſt; or, as Peter afterward proclaimed him at Cæſaria, Acts x. 36. "Lord of "all." As ſuch his people receive him; they receive Chriſt Jeſus the Lord, Col. ii. 6. They willingly ſubmit themſelves and ſurrender to him as their Lord, to be ruled by him, who hath redeemed them with his blood. Thus true faith in Chriſt as a Saviour engages the ſubject to him as his ſovereign; and accordingly unbelievers are deſcribed to be ſuch, "who would not "that Chriſt ſhould reign over them," Luke xix. 27. But they who are made willing in the day of his power are the voluntary ſubjects of his kingdom. Now to them who thus obey Chriſt, the Holy Ghoſt is ſaid to be given of God, they are all partakers of this divine Spirit, of whom they are born again and brought to believe, being effectually called through the power of this omnipotent agent of the covenant; and believing on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, they receive the gift of the Holy Ghoſt, Acts ii. 38. Even all that are called,

whether Jew or Gentile, are "made to drink into one "ſpirit," 1 Cor. xii. 13. Each believer hath a meaſure of the Spirit in his gifts and graces, according to the will and wiſdom of our heavenly Father. So then to obey is to believe; and thoſe on whom this divine witneſs is beſtowed, are all and only them who through grace are brought to the obedience of faith. Thus our apoſtle declares concerning the Gentiles in general who were called, Acts xv. 8. "That God "bear them witneſs, giving them the Holy Ghoſt:"

But the main point is the teſtimony of this glorious perſon unto the truth, that the Father raiſed up his Son Jeſus, and hath exalted him with his right-hand; for, though the ſubject in purſuit is the reſurrection of Chriſt, yet theſe cannot be ſeparated in the teſtimony of the Holy Ghoſt. The witneſs of the apoſtles could reach no farther than the infallible proofs they had of Jeſus being alive after his paſſion, or at fartheſt that after the moſt convincing evidence that he was truly the ſelf-ſame perſon, and no other than the Lord who was crucified, ſome of them ſaw him aſcend towards heaven; but the Holy Ghoſt came down from heaven in conſequence of his actual ſeſſion at the right-hand of God, as will hereafter be ſeen from chap. ii. 33. So that the witneſs of the Spirit neceſſarily includes a teſtimony of the Saviour's exaltation, which nevertheleſs terminates firſt on his reſurrection from the dead, without which he could never have been received into glory. The queſtion is, how the Holy Ghoſt became a witneſs of this wonderful, but certain and intereſting fact? And, according to ſcripture, the Holy Ghoſt

may

may be ſaid to witneſs as a ſpirit of prophecy, Heb. x. 15. The Holy Ghoſt is ſtiled a witneſs of the death of Chriſt as a ſacrifice for ſin, and the efficacy thereof to the putting it away, according to the ſcope of the place, on account of his having ſpoken by the prophets concerning the remiſſion of ſins: he is therefore called a witneſs, even becauſe he foretold what implied a ſatisfaction to be made for ſin by the blood-ſhedding of the Meſſiah, through which alone forgiveneſs could be obtained; but this is not ſo directly to the purpoſe; our buſineſs is to conſider in what way the Holy Ghoſt did actually teſtify after the aſcenſion of Chriſt, that he was riſen from the dead; and this he did both externally, and alſo in an internal manner.

Firſt, We may conſider his external evidence, which extended to all wherever the goſpel was preached in the primitive times; it lay open to the view of every ſpectator, or hearer of the word, called or uncalled, and was given more eſpecially as a ſign for the conviction of unbelievers. The miraculous operations of the Holy Ghoſt were doubtleſs one kind of teſtimony he gave to the reſurrection of Chriſt. Theſe conſiſted in extraordinary powers communicated to the apoſtles for the ſpreading of the goſpel, as by the gift of tongues, together with that ſpirit of wiſdom, utterance and boldneſs with which thoſe firſt and great miniſters were inſpired; this aſtoniſhed their enemies, Acts iv. 13. and tended to convince the world of their divine miſſion, and to promote the credit of the doctrine they preached; beſides the miracles they wrought, ſuch as healing the ſick, caſting out devils, and conveying

veying miraculous powers to others, by the laying on of their hands in the ſight of all men: ſo that with great power or ability, as the word ſignifieth, gave the apoſtles witneſs to the reſurrection of the Lord Jeſus, Acts iv. 33. Add to this their amazing ſucceſs, which was not by their power or might, but by the Spirit of the living God. Thus the Holy Ghoſt in a variety of inſtances attended the apoſtles in their miniſtrations in every place, and it might truly be ſaid, on account of his wonderful operations, that great grace was upon them all; and this was one way in which the Holy Spirit became a witneſs with theſe choſen diſciples of the reſurrection of Jeſus. I ſee no room to queſtion that this external evidence of the Spirit is what the apoſtle chiefly if not ſolely intends in this place, ſince he is ſpeaking to the high-prieſt and other unbelieving Jews; beſides the evidence of them who are properly witneſſes of our Saviour's reſurrection, and of the Holy Ghoſt conſidered under that character, was to be laid before the world; and conſequently muſt be by ſomething external and viſible; ſomething adapted to, and level with the capacity of men as reaſonable creatures, and ſuch as natural men can receive. Such were the wonderful works wrought by the power of the Spirit referred to. Indeed, as hath been truly obſerved, a miracle proves nothing immediately; but that there is a cauſe equal to the effect: but ſince a real miracle is unqueſtionably the finger of God, it is a manifeſt proof of his integrity, by whoſe hand it is performed, and confirms his veracity in the atteſtation he makes of a fact upon his own knowledge, and conſequently of the fact itſelf; for it cannot with decency be

ſuppoſed that the omniſcient and faithful Jehovah would ſet his ſeal to an impoſtor or a lie: we may therefore juſtly eſteem the extraordinary and miraculous works by the apoſtles, and their amazing ſucceſs through the efficacious operations of the Spirit, whereby they triumphed over the inveterate prejudices of Jews and Gentiles in every place, as a glorious proof of the divine Spirit with them to the world, that Jeſus was riſen again: which proof ſtands recorded to the condemnation of unbelievers; for herein, beſides the abundant and ſufficient teſtimony of men, they have ſet before them alſo the witneſs of God. But,

Secondly, THERE is another way in which the Holy Ghoſt anſwers this character, namely, by his internal witneſs, which is peculiar to the faithful, and reſults from his work and abode in their hearts; thus it is declared, 1 John v. 10. "He that believeth on the Son "of God, hath the witneſs in himſelf." Nothing is more deſpiſed by many, as fooliſh and enthuſiaſtical, than the work and witneſs of the Spirit in his ſaints, on which vital religion depends. I ſhould rejoice in the conviction of any ſuch ignorant ſcoffer; but my view is principally the eſtabliſhment of them that believe; it will therefore not be impertinent, and I hope it may be uſeful, that I attempt to clear this paſſage from the cloud drawn over it by the falſe gloſſes and bold contradictions of ſome. It is affecting to ſee men who have employed their ſuperior talents with ſucceſs, in ſtating the external evidence of chriſtianity, as if they were ſtrangers to the power of the goſpel; God knoweth, on every occaſion bending their utmoſt force

force againſt the operations of the Holy Spirit on the heart, whereby he becomes a witneſs in the faithful! Some deny that the apoſtle here appeals to an inward teſtimony of the Spirit, and inſinuate that he ſpeaks of the extraordinary powers which believers obtained, who could not but credit the reality of thoſe powers of which they were conſcious. According to theſe gentlemen therefore when the apoſtle ſaith, "He that "believeth hath the witneſs in himſelf," he appeals to the powers of the Spirit which the believer had received, manifeſt in their effects; and this they would have to be that witneſs of the Holy Ghoſt whereof Peter ſpeaks: So that in reality this inward witneſs depends on an external evidence, and comes to nothing more than a certain conſciouſneſs of extraordinary powers received; which being exerted, witneſſed to the ſubject that Jeſus was riſen from the dead. And who cannot ſee that, according to this, it is the viſible effect of this miraculous power, and not the power itſelf, which is truly and properly the teſtimony a believer receives, but can this be ſtiled "a wit-"neſs in himſelf? Beſides theſe very men allow, yea they inſiſt, that theſe extraordinary gifts of the Spirit hath long ceaſed in the church. Thus we are at once ſecured from any enthuſiaſtic notion of an inward teſtimony of the Spirit common to the faithful, and every believer is cut off from any expectation of finding this witneſs in himſelf, ſo plainly aſſerted by the apoſtle. It is well for the chriſtian that the ſcripture cannot be broken.

But a little reflection may ſhew this confined interpretation unjuſt. The apoſtle John is not diſtinguiſhing the faithful one from another; he is conſidering mankind as children of God or children of the devil: and with reſpect to the former, he does not ſay this or the other believer hath the witneſs in himſelf; on the contrary the individual pronoun He, determines the ſenſe to be univerſal and particular, and conſequently that every renewed perſon hath this teſtimony in his own breaſt. And as to the paſſage in the Acts we are upon, Peter ſpeaks indefinitely of them that obey the goſpel of Chriſt; nor ſhould any man take the liberty as ſome preſume, to confine the text by paraphraſing the ſentence thus, 'them that obey him;' i. e. ſay they, 'the apoſtles and many others who have 'ſubmitted to his government,' there being no ſuch limitation in the ſcope or words of the inſpired writer. That the witneſs which the believer hath in himſelf, aſſerted in this clauſe, is to be underſtood of a teſtimony, which ariſeth in the heart or conſcience of every one that is called, and not to be confined to the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghoſt, with which ſome only were endowed even in the primitive times, is clear from the obvious deſign of the apoſtle. He wrote his epiſtle with a view to eſtabliſh the diſciples in the doctrine of Chriſt, relating to his appearance in the fleſh, and that each one born of the Spirit might know that he believed on his name; to this end he aſſerts that "the Son of God was manifeſted to take "away our ſins;" and then declares the infallible proof which he and others had of this truth, even after his

his reſurrection from the dead. He declares, chap. i. "That they had heard, ſeen, looked upon, and handled "of the word of life;" and goes on to certain criterions of the regenerate, among which this is one, namely, "he "that believeth hath the witneſs in himſelf." The witneſs of what? Why doubtleſs of this, that Jeſus who was God manifeſt in the fleſh, having actually made propitiation by the blood of the croſs, roſe from the dead, aſcended to glory, and lives with the Father to interceed for his people. Now of this, ſaith the apoſtle, the believer "hath the witneſs in himſelf;" i. e. he hath by the work of the Spirit in his own heart an undeniable proof that Jeſus is riſen; which exactly correſponds with the nature of that hope unto which the regenerate are begotten, 1 Pet. i. 3. It is a lively hope grounded in the reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt from the dead, raiſed by the agency of that Spirit which the Father beſtowed in conſequence of the exaltation of his Son, who died for our ſins and roſe again: So that whoever is quickened by the Spirit of life in Chriſt, hath a witneſs in himſelf that Jeſus, whom he truſteth, is raiſed from the dead. And is there any thing abſurd in this teſtimony? Is it not clear and moſt certainly true, that if quickening grace, regeneration and ſaving faith are of the Spirit, ſent down from the Saviour, who ſits at the right-hand of God, as the ſcriptures declare, then every one that believes hath this witneſs in himſelf, the Holy Ghoſt, in the execution of his office, and by theſe efficacious influences of his grace, muſt be an infallible witneſs in the called, that Jeſus who ſends him is riſen and exalted. This divine operation is truly myſterious,

myſterious, and what the world cannot receive, and it is no cauſe of wonder that natural men ſhould contradict the things of the Spirit they are not able to diſcern. But admitting this work in the ſoul, which, would to God he that oppoſeth himſelf to the truth, might experience, the reaſon of this evidence to the happy ſubject, for this kind of proof is purely perſonal, is ſo obvious as ſcarce to be denied; the chriſtian indeed hath not always a practical ſenſe of this joyful aſſurance of his Saviour's reſurrection, the ground of his hope, which reſults from the quickening of the Spirit; this greatly depends on his frame; but he that is the ſubject of a divine change by the power of the Holy Ghoſt, whoſe miſſion is from the exalted Redeemer, muſt needs be poſſeſſed of a virtual proof in his own experience that Jeſus is alive from the dead. How is it poſſible that a man begotten to a lively hope, by the reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead, which belongs to the character of every chriſtian, I ſay, how can it be that this man ſhould be deſtitute of a witneſs in himſelf that Jeſus is riſen? it is therefore moſt rational, and conſequently without any the leaſt tincture of enthuſiaſm, that the apoſtle in the paſſage referred to, is underſtood of that inward teſtimony which reſults from the work of the Spirit in the faithful to the reſurrection of him in whom they believe; but whether it is becoming in any one to wreſt the ſcripture, in order to contradict an appeal of this nature, and to deride the witneſs of the Holy Ghoſt in his people, the Reader will judge.

But this teſtimony of the Spirit in the ſaints unto their Lord's reſurrection is not confined to his general work on their hearts, whereby they are quickened and effectually called. It likewiſe appears in the ſame manner it does in reſpect of the divine authority of the ſcriptures, namely, by urging on their mind the witneſs of the apoſtles and other external evidences of the important event, whereby they are powerfully convinced and fully perſuaded that he is riſen indeed. Till the Spirit doth thus as it were join witneſs with the conſcience of a man, and thereby renders effectual the arguments or motives ariſing from the evidence given, he is not eſtabliſhed in this foundation of God. Now as a judicious writer* obſerves, on the like illuminations or efficacious impreſſions of the Spirit, in confirmation of the ſcriptures, it may juſtly be noted, that the inward witneſs I aſſert, or rather which is aſſerted by the inſpired apoſtle, is by no means enthuſiaſm; for it is a diſcovery or confirmation in the mind and conſcience by means and inſtruments; whereas every one knows, that enthuſiaſm, in our common acceptation of the word, is mere imagination and conceit, without any reaſon or motive grounded in evidence, and that the deluded ſubject pours contempt on theſe, and indeed, for the moſt part on all other moral cauſes whatever. Thus without rejecting external evidence as a reaſon or motive to believe any fact that concerns

* Dr. John Edwards, a man of ſingular piety and learning, whoſe works are too full of ſtrong reaſoning and ſolid arguments, on every point, to be charged with enthuſiaſm, without manifeſt prejudice; ſee him on the authority, ſtile and perfection of ſcripture. Vol. I. page 48. 1693.

concerns our ſalvation, we may boldly declare, that the divine faith, proper to a regenerate man, is ſupernatural and not mere moral ſuaſion, but as the apoſtle expreſſes, it is in the demonſtration of the Spirit and with power; or in other words, that the faith of the choſen doth not ſtand in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of God, 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.

We live in a day of prevailing infidelity, wherein ſceptics abound, and ſhould be furniſhed with arguments to ſtop the mouth of a ſcornful unbeliever; nor was the church ever ſo amply provided with means for that purpoſe. The bold libels of deiſts have produced many learned and ſolid anſwers in defence of revelation; but Sir, I am ſorry the caution is needful; when you read ſome of theſe ingenuous and able authors, who have well defended the external evidence of chriſtianity, with all due reſpect to their character, you muſt beware, leſt you are ſtumbled in relation to points of chriſtian experience, for it is melancholy to obſerve, that a deiſt cannot more oppoſe the authenticity of ſcripture, than ſome men who plead for it ſeem averſe to the notion of an efficacious work of the Spirit of God in them that are called. Thoſe treatiſes on the veracity of the ſacred writings, which occaſionally ſtrike at the operations and witneſs of the Holy Ghoſt in believers, appear to me the moſt dangerous means of flattering men who are deſtitute of the life and power of godlineſs to their ruin. But I hope the Reader is convinced, that there is no reaſon for rejecting the notion of an appeal to the inward teſtimony of the Spirit in the clauſe abovementioned; for if the pri-

mitive chriſtians, as theſe writers urge, might be ſaid each to have a witneſs in himſelf of the reſurrection of Jeſus, ariſing from his being conſcious of extraordinary powers communicated to him, much more muſt the quickening and comforting influences of the Holy Ghoſt, which proceed on a conviction of the Redeemer's being raiſed from the dead, be a teſtimony of this glorious event in the ſubject of his grace. In one word, the apoſtle expreſsly declares, that "he that "believeth hath the witneſs in himſelf." And is it not ſtrange, that any who pretend to the faith of the goſpel, ſhould preſume to aſſert, that he doth not appeal to an inward teſtimony of the Spirit, and to make way for the credit of this confident aſſertion, endeavour to fix an odium on the notion of ſuch a teſtimony, by ſtiling thoſe who avow it 'modern enthuſiaſts!' But ſurely this can never be taken for reaſon or argument; it only ſhews that men of great ingenuity and learning in other reſpects, may be under ſtrong prejudices againſt a ſupernatural work and witneſs of the Spirit in the hearts of God's people, however clearly revealed to be the experience, not only of modern, but alſo, of ancient believers, even of all the faithful from the beginning of chriſtianity. Reflect then, O Chriſtian, on thine own experience, and be not aſhamed to own, but gladly rejoice that thou haſt from the Spirit that dwelleth in thee, a ſure and ſtanding teſtimony of thy Saviour's reſurrection!

THUS not only the apoſtles, but the Holy Ghoſt alſo witneſſed the reſurrection of Jeſus from the dead. He did ſo by the miraculous powers with which the

apoſtles

apoſtles and others were endowed in the firſt ages of chriſtianity; and likewiſe by the operation of his grace in them that believed. The viſible effects of theſe extraordinary powers were a ſign to the world for the conviction of many, while his work and teſtimony in the hearts of them that were called poſſeſſed each happy ſubject of his grace with a witneſs in himſelf, that God had indeed raiſed up Jeſus who was crucified and ſlain. And truly, ſince this work in the hearts of the redeemed, proceeds on the certainty of Chriſt's reſurrection, which lies at the bottom of their hope, it is ſo far from being enthuſiaſm, modern enthuſiaſm, as ſome modern advocates for revelation have been pleaſed to call it, that nothing can be more rational, for on a ſuppoſition of ſuch a work of the Spirit, it is impoſſible it ſhould be otherwiſe.

How undeniable and ſatisfactory then is the evidence of Chriſt's reſurrection! "If we receive the witneſs "of men the witneſs of God is greater," 1 John v. 9. And eſpecially as this witneſs of the Holy Ghoſt terminates in the heart of every chriſtian by the work of his grace. Then enquire, my Friend: Hath he quickened and begotten thee to a lively hope by the return of Jeſus from the dead? Without this experience, a ſimple credit of the ſcriptures, and this wonderful fact they relate, will leave thee ſhort of ſalvation: But with this divine hope be not afraid, thy redemption draweth nigh, only let thy converſation be in heaven, whence thy Saviour is coming; thou muſt ſhortly ſee death and corruption, but thy dead body like his ſhall

ariſe, "according to the working whereby he is able "to ſubdue all things to himſelf."

WHAT a fearful condition muſt unbelievers be in, when Jeſus ſhall be revealed from heaven to take vengeance on them who deny his reſurrection! At his tribunal ſeat, how will they ſtand it, when all theſe choſen witneſſes ſhall riſe up in judgment againſt them; and the Holy Ghoſt alſo, whoſe teſtimony they have rejected, and it may be blaſphemed! O that thoſe who ſcornfully ſet themſelves againſt the truth and power of chriſtianity, were awakened to conſider, that they would hearken to the voice of the Spirit they at preſent deſpiſe! "To-day, ſaith the Holy Ghoſt, "even while it is called to-day, harden not your "hearts." And againſt the diſobedient he himſelf will be a witneſs to their everlaſting confuſion! On the other hand, how deſirable are the renewed teſtimonies of the Spirit in the heart. Every ſenſible operation of the Holy Ghoſt and ſealing of that divine Comforter, is a freſh witneſs in and to the believer. O that under the powerful influences of his grace we might daily more and more, by our faith, love and fruit, hold forth a riſen Saviour, and manifeſt to all, that indeed we are riſen with him! In a word, let us earneſtly plead for this Arm of the Lord with the preaching of the goſpel, that many who are now dead in ſin, being quickened, may believe on the Son of God, that being buried with Chriſt in baptiſm unto death, like as he was raiſed up from the dead, by the glory of the Father, even ſo they alſo may walk in newneſs of life, to the praiſe of his grace.

LECTURE

LECTURE VI.

The aſcenſion of Jeſus. His ſeſſion at the right-hand of God.

HAVING conſidered the witneſs of the Spirit, with that of the apoſtles to our Lord's reſurrection, we now return to the famous firſt ſermon which Peter preached at Jeruſalem. That intereſting point being manifeſt, he proceeds to ſhew how it came to paſs that the diſciples were endowed from on high in the wonderful manner his audience had ſeen. This glorious part of his diſcourſe is recorded, Acts ii. 33, 34 and 35 verſes, in the following terms, "Therefore being "by the right hand of God exalted, and having re- "ceived of the Father the promiſe of the Holy Ghoſt, "he hath ſhed forth this which ye now ſee and hear: "For David is not aſcended into the heavens; but "he ſaith himſelf, The Lord ſaid unto my Lord, "Sit thou on my right-hand, until I make thy foes thy "footſtool." Note here in general, that the apoſtle doth not barely aſſert, but makes it evident that Chriſt was to aſcend to the throne in the heavens, in which he is an example to preachers in every age. His call and furniture as a miniſter were both extraordinary, yet he aſſumes no dominion over the faith of his hearers, but proves his doctrine from the oracles of God, and

endeavours to perſuade the Jews, by an appeal to the writings of David, whom they all owned a prophet: In like manner the miniſters of Jeſus are to convince gain-ſayers, and to ſeek their converſion, not by dogmatic aſſertions, but by reaſoning out of the ſcriptures, there being no other method adapted to affect the conſciences of men with the authority of God, without which they cannot be ſaved.

But to return. In this paſſage a door is opened in heaven; and O how illuſtrious and delightful the ſcene! Behold, Chriſtian, thy Saviour ſits there, crowned with glory and honour, to pour out bleſſings on his people, and reward them that hate him! The following particulars are to be noted in this divine proſpect, namely, the aſcenſion of Jeſus, his ſeſſion at the right-hand of God, the hand of the Father in placing him there, what paſſed between them on his being exalted, and the period of his preſent ſituation; all which afford nouriſhment to the faith of God's people, and are a ground of their joy in the Lord: Let us then briefly attend to each in its order.

That Chriſt lives exalted in the heavens, is a truth of the utmoſt importance to the faithful, for we are ſaved by his life with the Father; but this is impoſſible if he aſcended not to him; the apoſtle therefore argues the point and proves, that he whom God hath exalted, and conſequently who is aſcended, is not the Pſalmiſt but Chriſt. His reaſoning ſtands thus, ver. 34. "For "David is not aſcended into the heavens;" for he had before

before obſerved, that his body remained in the ſtate of the dead; but he, David, ſaith himſelf; "The Lord "ſaid unto my Lord, i. e. the Meſſiah, Sit thou on "my right hand." Not David therefore, but Chriſt is aſcended. Can any thing be more concluſive or juſt? The prophet lay buried in his ſepulchre with the Jews, and therefore could not be aſcended; but he ſpake of the Meſſiah, whom God would raiſe up to ſit on his throne, even Jeſus who is now alive from the dead, and ſits at the right hand of God, which implies his aſcenſion; and accordingly Jeſus is gone into heaven.

FROM this reaſoning of the apoſtle it appears, that the aſcenſion of our Lord has reſpect to his human nature, and is no other than his going or being carried up in the body from earth into heaven; a local remove, by which a change of place is inferred: ſo that Jeſus no longer corporally reſides in this lower world, but is retained in the heavens, in which he is received. This is variouſly expreſſed: It is declared, he was *parted* or *taken* up from them: At other times he is ſaid to *go:* And again, that he *went* up to heaven, for he was active in aſcending by his own power and right; and at the ſame time in reality, as will hereafter be ſhewn, the Father exalted him. Of this aſcenſion of the Meſſiah the Old Teſtament ſaints were not unacquainted. It has been thought that the tranſlation of Enoch, and the aſſumption of Elijah, were ſhadows of this great event; inſtances which at leaſt ſhew a credibility of a bodily entrance into the hea-

venly ſtate*. However Noah's ark will be admitted a figure of Chriſt, out of which the patriarch aſcended, as Jeſus from the grave, 1 Pet. iii. 20. And the returning of Moſes's ark to Mount-Sion, and placing it in the tabernacle, after many years dwelling in the houſe of Ahimelech, ſome conſider in the ſame point of light, which ſeems favoured by the prophet, who referring to that joyful ſeaſon, cries out, "Lift up "your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up ye ever-"laſting doors, and the King of glory ſhall come in. "Who is this King of glory? The Lord of Hoſts," Pſalm xxiv. 17. And further, it is manifeſt from Heb. ix. 24. that the entrance of the Jewiſh high-prieſt within the veil, on the day of atonement, typified that of our forerunner Jeſus into heaven, the true holy place. Thus there have been ſeveral types or emblems of the aſcenſion of our Saviour into the heavens.

THERE are likewiſe many ſcripture teſtimonies, beſides the paſſage before us, which plainly refer to this grand and important article of faith. Daniel ſaw in a viſion! "The Son of man coming with the "clouds of heaven to the Ancient of days, and they "brought him near before him, and there was given "him dominion, glory, and a kingdom," chap. vii. 13,

* Note, Not that any natural or corruptible body can be ſuppoſed capable of the heavenly glory: "Fleſh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of "God," 1 Cor. xv. 50. Hence they who ſhall be found alive at the coming of Chriſt, and therefore ſleep or die not, "ſhall be changed in a "moment:" In like manner, no doubt, the bodies of theſe ſaints were inſtantaneouſly transformed into a ſpiritual incorruptible ſtate: Nor is there any difficulty in conceiving this ſudden and wonderful change by the Almighty, though in an atom, or the ſmalleſt article of time that can be imagined; which the apoſtle finely illuſtrates by the "twinkling of an eye,"

13, 14. which cannot refer to his ſecond appearance. Since then he will come, not to *receive*, but to *deliver* up a kingdom to the Father, 1 Cor. xv. 24. Yea theſe ancient propheſies go farther than barely to point out that the Meſſiah ſhould aſcend; they likewiſe enter into the glorious circumſtances in which he was to go up. The Saviour did not aſcend alone, and in ſilence, as when he deſcended to his ſtate of humiliation, but in a magnificent manner, with a ſhining retinue as became him, who having by the death of his croſs, triumphed over principalities and powers, was entering into his glory, to fill all things * for the completing of his mediatorial kingdom. It ſeems no vain conjecture that the ſaints who came out of their graves after our Lord's reſurrection went with him to glory; for is it reaſonable to ſuppoſe that they returned to the earth? If not, they are doubtleſs received into heaven, and why not with the Saviour? But of this we are certain, that Jeſus aſcended with a multitude of the heavenly hoſt, Pſalm lxviii. 17. "The "chariots of God are twenty thouſand, even thou- "ſands, or many thouſands, of angels; The Lord is "among them as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou "haſt aſcended on high." And again, Pſalm xlvii. 5. "God is gone up with a ſhout, the Lord with the "ſound of a trumpet." Thus we are told, 1 Theſs. iv.

* Eph. iv. 10. "To fill all things," i. e. all things needful to the perfecting his body the church; as appears from what follows; for in reſpect of the omnipreſence eſſential to his divine nature, he filled all things before his aſcenſion, and they who underſtand and conſider the nature of corporal ſubſtance, which cannot be infinitely extended, will reject the notion of the ubiquity of our Saviour's natural body as entirely falſe and abſurd.

iv. 16. "The Lord himſelf ſhall deſcend from heaven "with a ſhout, with the voice of the archangel and "with the trump of God;" which agrees with the report to the diſciples, Acts i. 11. From whence it appears, that the aſcenſion of Jeſus was in like manner as hereafter his coming from heaven ſhall be, namely, local, viſible, and glorious.

To the witneſs of the prophets we have our Lord's own prediction that he ſhould aſcend; of which he is thought to give early intimation in his diſcourſe with Nicodemus, John iii. 12. but in that with his diſciples on the night in which he was betrayed, he is plain and expreſs, John xvi 2. "I go to the Father." And again, chap. xvi. 28. "I came from the Father, "and am come into the world: again, I leave the "world and go to the Father." This they well underſtood, as appears from the following verſe, "Lo, now "ſpeakeſt thou plainly, and ſpeakeſt no proverb." And in chap. xiv. 29. after repeating the ſame thing, Jeſus ſaith, "And now I have told you before it "come to paſs, that when it is come to paſs, ye "might believe." And accordingly, on the morning he roſe, he ſays to Mary Magdalene, "Touch me not, "for I am not yet aſcended to my Father, but go to "my brethren, and ſay unto them, I aſcend, &c." Had the diſciples never underſtood that the Lord was to aſcend, this meſſage had been ſtrange and perplexing; but he reminds them of what he foretold, for this reaſon among others, leſt they ſhould flatter themſelves that he would tarry with them henceforth, and ſet up a kingdom on earth, now he was riſen from the dead,

which

which they ſtill fondly expected, and that at his departure they might be fully perſuaded that he was indeed gone to the Father, as he declared before his deceaſe.

It has been very properly noted, that there was no neceſſity for the diſciples to ſee their Maſter riſe out of his grave, ſince he was to abide many days, and to afford them repeated and undeniable proof of his being alive from the dead, but the article of his aſcenſion is very differently circumſtanced. After he was taken up into heaven, he was no more to be ſeen in this world, it was therefore requiſite that they ſhould behold him aſcend to their full ſatisfaction, that they might teſtify on their own knowledge whither he was gone, and accordingly we find them eye-witneſſes of the fact in the moſt perfect manner that can be conceived.

On the credit of ſcripture nothing can be more certain or plain than that Jeſus did truly and properly aſcend, or go up into heaven bodily in the ſight of his diſciples: They afford a particular account of this important event, relating to the time, place, and manner of its accompliſhment. It was forty days after his reſurrection, on Mount-Olivet, in the confines of Bethany, near if not on the ſelf-ſame ſpot, to which Chriſt often retired, and where once under dreadful apprehenſions of wrath, being in an agony, he ſweat drops as blood: So that from the very place in which he was heretofore ſeen in the utmoſt diſtreſs, deſcending into an hell of darkneſs and ſufferings, we

now

now behold the Redeemer alive from the dead, with gladneſs, aſcending to heaven. How different the ſcene!—A dying Saviour filled with horror and anguiſh, and covered with ſhame?—A riſen Jeſus, with joy and triumph, advancing to his glory!

But the manner in which our Lord was removed is ſtill more punctually recited. The evangeliſt Mark thus relates it, "So then after the Lord had ſpoken "unto them he was received up into heaven!" Mark xvi. 19. And Luke in his goſpel, chap. xxiv. 50, 51. declares, that "he led them out as far as Bethany, "and he lift up his hands and bleſſed them; and it "came to paſs while he bleſſed them he was parted "from them and carried up into heaven." But in Acts i. 9, 10. he is very particular and ſtriking, "And when he had ſpoken theſe things, while they "beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received "him out of their ſight, and while they looked ſted-"faſtly toward heaven as he went up, &c." This was the manner in which Jeſus was parted from his diſciples; not by diſappearing at once, or vaniſhing out of their ſight, as on ſome other occaſions; No, it was not a ſudden or haſty tranſport, but he moved up before them while their eyes were fixed upon him; ſo that they ſaw him, and ſtedfaſtly looked as he advanced to the viſible heaven, till at length they beheld the cloud receive him.

To underſtand this cloud metaphorically of angels, as ſome have ſuggeſted, ſeems rather to prejudice the account, and to weaken the apoſtles evidence: who need

need be told that it is not the part of an hiſtorian to deal in figures? And the evangeliſt expreſsly declares that a cloud received the Lord; the ſight of which was a natural and evident proof to them that beheld it, that he was taken up into heaven. Neither Luke himſelf, nor any other preſent on the occaſion, appear to have the leaſt apprehenſion of angels; and if their teſtimony is at all to be regarded, no doubt they were in the perfect exerciſe of their natural ſenſes, and could not be deceived, but in reality ſaw what they relate: We may therefore conclude it was truly and properly a cloud diſtinguiſhed in the viſible heavens; a cloud prepared to encloſe the body of Jeſus, in which he was conveyed to the higher regions by myriads of angels, who, though unſeen by the diſciples, we know attended the victorious Redeemer to his palace in glory.

It is with reaſon ſuppoſed, that this cloud was at a conſiderable diſtance from the earth, and it is plain, that from the moment Chriſt began to be lifted up, his diſciples had their eyes upon him; ſo that they beheld him gradually mount in the air, higher and higher, till he reached the bright cloud, into which, as ſometimes the natural ſun, they ſaw him enter, loſt ſight of his body, and ſaw him no more. And that they were not miſtaken is clear from the teſtimony of the angels, "Ye men of Galilee, why "ſtand ye gazing into heaven? this ſame Jeſus which "is taken up from you into heaven ſhall ſo come in "like manner as ye have ſeen him go into heaven," ver. 11. Upon the whole it appears that the apoſtles were not under a deception, neither was it a viſion but a real

a real fact. Chriſt was indeed taken up into heaven, and they ſaw him go up in the manner deſcribed; there is therefore no colour of reaſon for any heſitation concerning the truth of this grand and important affair; and accordingly we find that the diſciples ſo far from doubting, or even regretting their Lord's being parted from them, that fully perſuaded he was gone to the Father, they worſhipped him unſeen, and exalted, "and returned to Jeruſalem; and how? "with tears and lamentation? No, but with great "joy, praiſing and bleſſing God," till endowed from on high, and then proceeded to preach him every where, with boldneſs, and with amazing ſucceſs. Now, who that conſiders this account, and eſpecially in connexion with the effuſion of the Spirit on the apoſtles, can a moment queſtion whether that this ſame Jeſus who deſcended is likewiſe aſcended to the Father? O my ſoul, turn up thine eyes with gratitude and joy; let thy affections aſcend like pillars of ſmoke to thy bleſſed Redeemer: Behold he is gone, he is gone up before thee to prepare a place for thee!

FROM the aſcenſion of Chriſt we proceed to his ſeſſion at the right hand of God. This glorious ſubject hath been frequently handled; nor have I any thing new to offer upon it, but ſhall attempt only a brief explication of this joyful aſſurance the goſpel affords. The deſign of Peter is not barely to ſhew that Jeſus is aſcended, but alſo to repreſent his exalted ſtate in the heavens; and this is contained in the quotation from David, verſe 34. "Sit thou on my right hand." Of this exaltation our Lord bare witneſs before Pontius Pilate, Luke xxii. 69.

69. "Hereafter ſhall the Son of man ſit on the right "hand of the power of God." And accordingly we are told, Mark xvi. 19. that when Jeſus was received up into heaven, he ſat on the right hand of God: And indeed the paſſages which teſtifie the ſame, are more than can now be recited; I ſhall therefore only ſubjoin the remarkable witneſs of Stephen the martyr, "Be-"hold, ſaith he, I ſee the heavens opened, and the "Son of man ſtanding on the right hand of God," Acts vii. 56. It cannot with decency be ſuppoſed that this holy man uttered a falſhood in the view of eternity, or would have preſumed to have committed his ſoul into the hands of Jeſus, as he inſtantly did, had he been doubtful of the truth of what he declared.

But how is Chriſt at the right hand of God? And what is implied in this ſituation? We are not, with ſome, to imagine that the Father has bodily parts: God is a ſpirit; and the Father never was clothed with fleſh. Here is therefore no compariſon between the right hand and the left, as when theſe expreſſions are uſed of corporal beings ‡: And that the phraſe is in this

‡ From Stephen's declaration to the Sanhedrim, admitting that the heavens were properly opened, as at the baptiſm of our Lord, and that the martyr actually ſaw Jeſus ſtanding at the right hand of God, it appears that there is a viſible diſplay of the glory of the Father in the heavenly temple, adapted to the corporal ſight of thoſe, who, like the Saviour, dwell there in a ſpiritual and glorified body as Enoch, Elijah, &c. Now in reſpect of this, Jeſus may be truly declared, in a literal ſenſe, at the right hand of God. The objection to the heavens being really divided, becauſe then it would have been a miracle if all that was preſent had not ſeen it, with ſubmiſſion, ſeems of no force; for why ſhould a miracle be thought ſtrange in this age, and on ſo extraordinary an occaſion? Beſides, in the caſe of Saul, when approaching Damaſcus, there was indeed a bright ſhining

this place purely metaphorical, is evident in that the prophet, ſoon after the words quoted in our text, repreſents Jehovah the Father at the right hand of his Son whom he had exalted, Pſalm cx. 5. "The Lord "at thy right hand ſhall ſtrike through kings in the "day of his wrath." Now the Son's ſitting at the right hand of the Father, conſiſts not with the Father's ſitting at the right hand of the Son, if the words are literally taken, but in a figurative ſenſe they are eaſily reconciled. The alluſion here is to the cuſtom of princes, who, it is known, on certain occaſions have diſtinguiſhed their favourites by placing them at the right hand of their throne; which anſwers to the account we have of our Saviour's ſituation in heaven: He is ſaid to be at the right hand of the throne of God and of the Majeſty in the heavens, Heb. viii. 1. compared with chap. xii. 2. This however is far from implying, that the Man Chriſt Jeſus is made equal, much leſs that he is ſuperior to him by whom he is exalted. Among men this place is frequently given in token of their ſuperior rank; but no ſuch thought can be admitted, even of the Meſſiah himſelf, in compariſon with the Father, whoſe ſervant he is: nor is this to be underſtood of a local limitation, which would reduce the words to a literal ſenſe; the impropriety of which has already been ſhewn

ſhining light his companions beheld, but they heard not diſtinctly the voice, neither did they ſee him that ſpake, both which the perſecutor did; and that his ſight of the Saviour was bodily, which neceſſarily implies the opening of the heavens, is clear from 1 Cor. xv. 8. Acts ix. 17. and chap. xxii. 14. The heavens therefore might actually be open to this holy man, notwithſtanding it was ſeen by none but himſelf: Nevertheleſs the phraſe of Chriſt's being at the right hand of God, in the language of prophecy, is rather metaphorical than literal, as in the paſſage quoted by Peter from David.

ſhewn. It is true, that the aſcenſion of Jeſus in the body implies a change of place; in conſequence of which, his corporal preſence is locally confined in the heavens, and will continue ſo till the reſtitution of all things; but the phraſe in the text hath no reſpect to place, but is purely expreſſive of his ſtate in the heavenly world, denoting,

1. THE honor and dignity to which he is advanced. Some pretend, that in the Eaſtern countries the left hand is eſteemed the moſt honorable: But will any imagine that Solomon placed his mother, the queen, on his right hand to diſgrace her? 1 Kings ii. 19. And certain it is, that we ſee Jeſus, who deſpiſed the ſhame when ſuffering for ſin, "crowned with honor "and glory," Heb. ii. 9. Into this he was to enter after his ſufferings, as foretold by the prophets. Hence in his diſcourſe with the diſciples when riſen from the dead, as they were walking to Emmaus, he ſaith, "Ought not Chriſt to have ſuffered theſe things, and to "enter into his glory?" Luke xxiv. 26. Thus dignified he now ſits at the right hand of the throne in the heavens, receiving the honor due to his Majeſty and merit, in the high praiſes and adorations of the angels and ſaints, who ſtand before and round about the throne, crying, "Salvation to our God which ſitteth on the "throne, and unto the Lamb," Rev. vii. 9, 10. Again,

2. THE power with which our Saviour is inveſted, is another thing implied in this ſentence. Thus Jeſus ſaith, "Ye ſhall ſee the Son of man ſitting on the

" right hand of power," Mark xiv. 62. We have already ſeen, that Daniel beheld in a viſion, dominion and a kingdom given him by the Ancient of days, chap. vii. 14. This power of the Redeemer is ſupreme, univerſal and unſpeakably great, to the glory of his name, and the joy of his people, as may hereafter be ſeen. Before his aſcenſion the Lord ſaith, " All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," Matt. xxviii. 18. And we are told, Phil. ii. 9. that " God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name " which is above every name." " He is over all; yea, " far above all heavens," Eph. iv. 10. The Father of glory hath ſet him at his own right hand in heavenly places, " far above all principality and power, and might, " and dominion, and every name that is named, not only " in this world, but alſo in that which is to come," Eph. i. 21. Thus, O Chriſtian, thy Saviour is exalted, " King of kings and Lord of Lords, and made " higher than the heavens," Heb. vii. 26. This is the real ſtate of the aſcended Jeſus, " who became obe- " dient unto death, even the death of the croſs." And further,

3. His ſitting at the right hand of God may denote the ſatisfaction, joy and pleaſure which Jeſus has in communion with the Father. This ſituation implies nearneſs, fellowſhip and reſt. If the ranſomed find ſatisfaction and joy in beholding their Father's face in righteouſneſs, and when they awake in his likeneſs, Pſalm xvii. 15. how much more muſt the Redeemer himſelf be rejoiced in the throne of his glory? This the prophet refers to, Pſalm xvi. 11. " Thou wilt ſhew me " the path of life: in thy preſence is fulneſs of joy:

" at

"at thy right hand there are pleaſures for ever "more."

FINALLY, The phraſe ſtill further implies his continuance in this glorified ſtate. Sitting is a poſture of reſt; and Chriſt will remain on his throne till he riſes up and comes forth unto judgment, as the ſcriptures abundantly ſhew, and our text in particular. So then the ſeſſion of Jeſus at the right hand of God imports his illuſtrious ſtate in the heavens, as crowned with glory, inveſted with power, and filled with ſatisfaction and joy in the fruition of his Father's preſence, and the honors that are paid him on the throne, in which he ſhall abide till his ſecond appearance. Thus exalted is the Man who died at Mount Calvary, and who, being raiſed from the dead, aſcended from earth into heaven. Great is this myſtery of godlineſs: Still God manifeſt in the fleſh is the perſon of our adorable Mediator, in whom, at the right hand of the Father, we behold the human nature, indeed infinitely below the nature of Deity, and unſpeakably inferior to that of the angels; yet wonderfully dignified in honor and power, even far above the heavens themſelves! Glorious reward of the cruciating ſorrows and ſhame endured on the croſs, when he made his ſoul an offering for ſin! And how full a vindication is this of the wiſdom and juſtice of God, in ordaining the fleſh of his Son to thoſe bitter ſufferings, in anſwer to the cavil of unbelievers, who preſume to find fault with the ſovereign good pleaſure of him who worketh all things according to the counſel of his own will, to the praiſe of his grace?

FROM this ſituation of our glorified Redeemer with the Father, every pretence of his bodily preſence on earth is entirely excluded. The notion of a corporal preſence in the ſacrament, as the Catholics teach in their doctrine of tranſubſtantiation, is not only abſurd and ſhocking, but it is in every ſenſe and view abſolutely inconſiſtent with the perſon of Chriſt, in and by the human nature, being ſeated at the right hand of God, in the heavenly world, as the ſcripture aſſerts, for "the heavens muſt "receive, i. e. retain him until the times of the reſti-"tution of all things," Acts iii. 21. From whence he is ready to be revealed; till then, a conceit of his bodily preſence on earth in any ſeaſon, or under any circumſtances whatever, is plainly a groundleſs and vain imagination. Nevertheleſs, Believer, his promiſe is ſure: This local circumſcription of our Saviour's body, interferes not with that ſpiritual preſence he hath encouraged his people to expect in his church, and with his miniſters to the end of the world. He is God and man; and as, while on earth, he was in heaven, in reſpect of his deity, John iii. 13. in like manner he is now, in virtue of the ſame divine nature, able to be, notwithſtanding the preſent detention of his human nature in the world of glory, with his ſaints below according to his word. Wherefore, O Chriſtian, whilſt thou art looking to Jeſus, the author and finiſher of thy faith, now on the throne in the heavens, expect the viſits of his love. "He is faithful that hath "promiſed;" and bleſſed are they who wait for him.

LECTURE

LECTURE VII.

The Father's concern in exalting his Son, who immediately receives the Spirit at his hands; with the noble end of his continuance on the throne. Reflections.

NOTHING yields the believer more ſatisfaction than the glorious ſtate of his Redeemer in the heavens; and his joy is enhanced when he conſiders by whom he is placed on the throne. Now it is with this the apoſtle begins his account: "Therefore being "by the right hand of God exalted," Acts ii. 33. This he likewiſe aſſerts in another diſcourſe: "Him "hath God exalted with his right hand," chap. v. 31. So then Jeſus is crowned by the Father himſelf: He is not only at the right-hand of God, but advanced to this dignity and power with or by the right hand of the Father; a myſtery that demands our peculiar attention. We have ſeen in the preceding lecture, that the right hand of God is a phraſe metaphorically uſed by the prophet; and this further appears by the various applications of it in the ſubject before us. And here I apprehend it denotes the exertion of his power according to his oath. The right hand of the Lord is his glorious power: "Thou haſt a mighty arm, ſtrong "is thy hand and high is thy right hand," Pſalm

lxxxix. 13. And from Eph. i. 19, 20. it appears that Jehovah the Father exerted the might of his power in Chriſt when he raiſed him up to his throne, as he ſwore with an oath to David his ſervant, ver. 30. And this figurative ſentence may alſo allude to the well-known ancient form in ſwearing, by a ſolemn elevation of the right hand to heaven. Thus John ſaw the angel in a viſion "ſtand upon the ſea and upon "the earth, lifting up his hand to heaven, and ſwearing "by him that liveth for ever and ever," Rev. x. 5, 6. In like manner it is declared, "The Lord hath ſworn "by his right hand and by the arm of his ſtrength," Iſa. lxii. 8. Thus Jeſus was raiſed and placed at the right hand of God far above every name that is named. It was the Father's own act, in the character of judge, by which the triumphant Redeemer, having made reconciliation for iniquity, was exalted, as agreed on in the covenant of peace: An article of no ſmall importance with them who believe. This, allow the expreſſion, is the glory of the glorified Saviour. He aſſumed not the throne in the heavens, which he fills, but aſcended and ſat down at the call, and by the power of the moſt High. It is true, Chriſt is thus highly exalted as the reward of his obedience to death, Phil. ii. 9. His dignified ſtate hath a meritorious cauſe in himſelf, and is no more than the ſtipulated and juſt return for the labour and victory of his croſs, by which he finiſhed the work of redemption. Herein our glorious King far exceeds all principalities and powers in heaven or on earth: Who, O thou Prince of life and Lord of glory, is like unto thee! Who among the ſons of the mighty to be compared with thee!

thee! Nor gods on high, nor gods below, whether angels or men, have any pretence to this claim; not the moſt illuſtrious ſeraphim, whoſe exalted dominion in the celeſtial world is neareſt to the Deity, can boaſt his deſert of the crown that he wears; but Jeſus hath an equitable right in the dignity and power he holds; and the honors of his throne proclaim the merit of his blood! Nevertheleſs, we ſee he exalted not himſelf, but is cloathed with majeſty by Jehovah the Father, whoſe ſervant he was, and in whom according to the ſettlements of infinite wiſdom, in the œconomy of man's ſalvation, the divine right of inveſtiture remained. Hail, O Chriſtian, thy King and Saviour is not an uſurper; he is crowned by authority; his throne is eſtabliſhed in righteouſneſs, and it cannot be moved! This ſpreads a joy among his ſubjects, under which they are ready to triumph, in the language of the prophet, and ſay, "The LORD is our "judge, the LORD is our law-giver, the LORD is "our King, he will ſave us!" Iſa. xxxiii. 22.

FROM the authority by which our Saviour is exalted we are led to another inſtance of grace. On his appearance in the heavens, a moſt grand and intereſting tranſaction immediately takes place between him and the Father. This deſerves our particular notice. When we conſider the mutual complacency of theſe divine perſons each in the other, the infinite delight of the Father in his Son as his elect ſervant, with the ſatisfaction he had in his finiſhed work on the croſs, and eſpecially if we add, how greatly the Redeemer longed after his glory which he had with his Father,

as Mediator, before the foundation of the world, we ſhall have reaſon to apprehend, that the honor and joy of their meeting in the throne, is not to be fully conceived. No doubt, as hinted before, when the King of glory entered, and was ſaluted by the Father, the heavens reſounded with the acclamations of their bleſt inhabitants, ſhouting the honors of God and of the Lamb. But we are here called to obſerve a freſh occaſion of triumph and praiſe. No ſooner is the great Interceſſor and Head of the church placed at the right hand of God, but behold the Father delivers the Spirit into his hands, by whom he is poured forth on the diſciples, according to the promiſe of the covenant, long ſince revealed, and engaged for by Jeſus himſelf before he aſcended. "Having received of the "Father the promiſe of the Holy Ghoſt, he hath ſhed "forth this which ye now ſee and hear." Adorable ſcene! See how the ſacred Three are united in fulfilling their covenant-engagements for the ſalvation of the church! Here, in a meaſure, is unfolded the methods of infinite wiſdom: the Father is firſt in order and operation in this myſtery of grace; from hence, as from the fountain and head, the Son is ſupplied with the Holy Ghoſt for the propagation of the goſpel and the gathering in his elect. Pauſe, my dear Reader, and admire. O this wonderful condeſcention and love! How unſearchable are the judgments of God and his ways of mercy with ſinners! "Lord, what is man "that thou ſhouldſt be mindful of him, or any of the "ſons of men that thou ſhouldſt thus viſit them!" This is no other than the good pleaſure of him who worketh all things according to the counſel of his own will,

will. Adore then his ſovereign grace! One branch of Chriſt's glory is his mediatorial fulneſs; this includes a diſpenſation of the Spirit, as a Spirit of grace, for the quickening thoſe who are redeemed with his blood. Hence the choſen have been called and ſanctified ſince the world began, yea, and the Holy Ghoſt, who moved and inſpired the prophets of old, was the Spirit of Chriſt, 1 Pet. i. 11. But that which is exhibited in the paſſage before us is, the ſending forth the Spirit from on high, by whoſe operations and miraculous gifts, the laſt ſeal was ſet to the authority of Jeſus, for the conviction of the world and the ſpread of his kingdom. Glorious ſight! Lo the captain of ſalvation, of whom it was written in the volume of the book, "I "delight to do thy will, O God," being made perfect through ſufferings, appears in heaven the advocate of his people! See him advance in robes of righteouſneſs, to the Father, as it were with the roll of the covenant in his hand, ratified in his blood! Behold how he pleads at the throne, and with authority demands the promiſe of the Holy Ghoſt, who immediately proceeds from the hands of the Father into thoſe of the Son, and from him to the waiting diſciples at Jeruſalem! The effuſion of the Spirit was the wonder of thoſe who beheld it on earth: But with what aſtoniſhment and joy muſt the heavenly hoſt view the ground and amazing proceſſion! On this bleſſed occaſion we may reaſonably ſuppoſe, that the innumerable company of angels, who pry into the myſtery of redemption, and rejoice in the converſion of a ſinner, with the thouſands of ſaints who compaſſed the throne, were filled with admiration, and ready to unite in that new ſong, ſaying with

with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was "ſlain to receive power, and riches, and wiſdom, and "ſtrength, and honor, and glory, and bleſſing!"

THUS Jeſus ſits enthroned in the heavens, having ſent forth the holy Spirit of promiſe. But, how long ſhall he continue in this glorious ſituation? Now this is declared in ver. 35. "Until I make thy foes "thy footſtool:" which opens to our view the deſign and period of that dignity and power with which the Father hath inveſted his Son, our bleſſed Redeemer. It may be proper here to remark that the glory of Chriſt, as head and lord of the elect is eternal; nor will the Man Chriſt Jeſus ever again be humbled or degraded; the Mediator ſhall reign on his throne in the ultimate ſtate of happineſs: And indeed whatever difficulties may attend a paſſage or two, relating to this divine myſtery, for inſtance his "delivering up the king-"dom to the Father," 1 Cor. xv. as one juſtly obſerves, it is ſtrange to think that Chriſt ſhould lay aſide his rule as ſoon as he has ſubdued all his foes; beſides his people are aſſured of reigning with him for ever in glory, Rom. v. 17. compared with Rev. xxii. 5. Agreeable to this is his prayer to his Father, John xvii. 24. "I will alſo that thoſe whom thou "haſt given me be with me where I am, that they "may behold my glory." Nevertheleſs the preſent form of his government and kingdom will be altered; the manner of which is not particularly revealed; but from this and other ſcriptures, it appears that he will not ever continue in the ſame circumſtances in which he now ſits at the right hand of God; but that when the end ſpecified in the text is anſwered, he will riſe from

from his throne and come forth to judgment, with unſpeakable power and glory. The exaltation of Jeſus is not alone for himſelf, or merely as the reward of his ſufferings, but alſo to apply the victory of his croſs, to accompliſh the number of his elect, and to bring down his enemies under his feet, that he may finiſh the myſtery of God in the ſalvation and happineſs of them that obey him. In the phraſe, "Until I make "thy foes thy footſtool," there is a manifeſt reference to a well-known cuſtom of conquerors; an example of which we have in the captains of Iſrael, who, at the direction of Joſhua their commander, put their feet on the necks of the five kings they had ſubdued at Gibeon. Thus ſhall the Captain of ſalvation tread down all his enemies, and trample them under his feet, as the mire of the ſtreet, into ſhame and everlaſting contempt.

But it may be uſeful to enquire, who are the foes of our bleſſed Redeemer? Can any one be ſo ſtupid and baſe as to oppoſe his glorious perſon, the grace of whoſe office, and whoſe condeſcention and love in undertaking for ſinners, with the triumphs of his croſs, challenge our higheſt regard? Sure it muſt argue a vile diſpoſition, to hate and oppoſe the Son of God, "who is the brightneſs of his Father's glory and the "expreſs image of his perſon;" or to reject that Almighty Saviour, who is poſſeſſed of every perfection as God and Mediator, and whoſe nature and power demand the obedience and love of every creature in heaven or in earth? An oppoſition to one ſo divinely great, and ſo immenſely good, is the height of folly and madneſs, and muſt proceed from a mind moſt wretchly depraved; yet, alas, the enemies of Jeſus abound both

on

on earth and in hell. The ſpiritual enemies of Chriſt, as the ſubſtitute of his people, were ſin, the curſe of the law, the malice and power of ſatan, this evil world, and death and the grave; theſe arrayed themſelves againſt him, when, through death, he deſtroyed the devil that had the power of death, having put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf; he overcame them all in the blood of his croſs, and virtually put them under his feet; and accordingly the prophet Iſaiah, chap. xiii. repreſents the Meſſiah coming from Edom, in dyed garments from Bozrah in apparel, ſplendid and red, as a mighty conqueror from the field of battle after a glorious victory, ſtained with the blood of his enemies. Thus a ſure foundation is laid for what follows; when the day of his redeemed is come, then will he tread down the people in his anger, and make them drunk in his fury, and bring down their ſtrength to the earth; then the laſt enemy ſhall be utterly deſtroyed, never to wound or hurt any more, but death and hell ſhall be caſt into the lake of fire.

But the foes more immediately intended, ſeem the wicked, who finally oppoſe the authority and grace of the Redeemer, whether men or devils. It is a humbling truth, but all mankind are enemies to Chriſt, the elect not excepted, though they are choſen by the Father, and the ranſomed of his Son, yet while in an unregenerate ſtate, they are enemies in their minds to the way of God's grace in Chriſt Jeſus to ſinners; of which Saul is a remarkable inſtance, who, though a choſen veſſel of mercy, was before his converſion a deſtroyer of the faith he afterwards preached. And truly

truly the oppoſition of a vain world to the pure goſpel, is more owing to the natural averſion of the carnal mind than ſeems generally apprehended; and ſome who are called, bewail the pride and obſtinacy with which in the time of their ignorance, they oppoſed it; but, being enlightened, and made willing by the power of God, they freely ſubmitted themſelves to Jeſus as their Lord, and obtained mercy and life at his hands. In like manner all real penitents, even though they have formerly blaſphemed the Son of man, ſhall be ſpared and received, when they who perſiſt in oppoſing him ſhall not eſcape his juſt indignation, but be miſerably abaſed under his feet; but the righteous ſhall be exalted in his favor.

And if on earth, much more in hell, are to be found inveterate, though impotent foes of the glorious and omnipotent Saviour. It has been ſuggeſted, that the fall of angels was owing to the envy of ſatan againſt the throne of God's Son, to which he impiouſly aſpired. Hence that apoſtate fiend, with all the principalities who joined under him in the fatal rebellion, were hurled down to hell by that divine Prince, at whoſe glory they preſumed to ſtrike. This may be thought a bold conjecture, beyond the line of revelation, and not to be indulged: But we may ſoberly conclude, that nothing ſhort of an inſolent tranſgreſſion againſt the Majeſty of heaven could be an occaſion of ſo fearful a doom: And we are certain that pride was the condemnation of the devil and his angels; but how this curſed root of moral evil took place in the celeſtial angels, ſo highly exalted in the creation, is a myſtery;

we

we know they were originally glorious and bleſſed, but that now theſe once illuſtrious and happy ſpirits are moſt vile and miſerable, inſomuch that they are held under chains of darkneſs unto a future judgment, by which they ſhall be conſigned to the torments of everlaſting fire. But it is vain to imagine the way in which theſe apoſtate angels were defected; be that as it may, we learn from the tremendous fact, that no creature is or can be impeccable, and alſo that ſin ſhall not go unpuniſhed. But what is intimated is, an oppoſition to the Son of God, in the character and work of Mediator: Under which conſideration hell is full of his foes. The malice and oppoſition of ſatan, and the infernal hoſt that are with him, are obvious; nor is it ſtrange, ſince the Son of God was manifeſted to deſtroy the works of the devil, and the whole buſineſs of Chriſt is to overthrow his kingdom of darkneſs; this ſeed of the woman is to break the ſerpent's head, in bringing many ſons to glory, whoſe deſtruction he had conceived. Thus ſaith the ſcriptures, "I will put enmity between thee and the "woman, and between thy ſeed and her ſeed; it "ſhall bruiſe thy head, and thou ſhalt bruiſe his **heel**," Gen. iii. 15. There is therefore an eternal enmity between Chriſt and the devil, an irreconcileable hatred; and whence ariſeth perpetual unwearied and violent attempts, againſt the authority and kingdom of Jeſus; and no doubt theſe are Chriſt's foes, whom the Father will ſubdue and bring under him; but the prophet ſeems to have more immediately in view, thoſe his enemies, the children of men, whether of high or low degree, who obſtinately perſiſt unto a final rejection of his

his authority and grace. However all the powers in earth or hell, that ſet themſelves againſt the Redeemer, ſhall be brought down under his feet. This indeed is gradually performed, for judgment will not be finiſhed till his people are gathered: 2 Pet. iii. 7. "The Lord is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, as "ſome men count ſlackneſs, but is long-ſuffering to "us-ward; not willing that any ſhould periſh, but "that all ſhould come to repentance." But no ſooner are the purpoſes of grace anſwered by this divine patience, but all things ſhall be put under Jeſus; including the moſt haughty and powerful who now exalt themſelves againſt him; then ſhall come to paſs that ſaying, "Aſk of me, and I will give thee the hea-"then for thy inheritance, and the uttermoſt parts of "the earth for thy poſſeſſion." Not to ſave by the efficacy of his goſpel, to which the paſſage is often applied, but to deſtroy, by the arm of his vengeance, all the diſobedient who oppoſe him; as appears from the terms of the prophecy itſelf, Pſalm ii. 9. "Thou "ſhalt break them with a rod of iron, thou ſhalt daſh "them in pieces like a potters veſſel!" See alſo Rev. ii. 27.

REVIEW the proſpect, dear Reader; lo, an aſcended Jeſus ſitting at the right hand of God, crowned with glory and power by Jehovah the Father himſelf, from whom we behold him receive the Holy Ghoſt, and pour him forth upon his diſciples, whoſe miraculous gifts were ſeen at Jeruſalem, in teſtimony of his exalted ſtate, in which he will abide until all who oppoſe him are under his feet; then ſhall the Son deliver

ver up the kingdom to the Father, having put down all rule and authority, and preſent his church faultleſs before the preſence of his glory with joy. Thus ſhall iſſue the preſent adminiſtration of his mediatorial work on earth, and he ſhall commence the viſible head of the glorified creation in the heavenly world, and continue the medium of communication between God and his people, who will be happy in their union and fellowſhip with him for ever!

And is Chriſt thus exalted? What then will become of thoſe who reject him! It is impoſſible to conceive the diſtreſs and confuſion that muſt attend them who are made his footſtool, when he takes vengeance. O the contempt and anguiſh of infidels, who finally reject or obſtinately refuſe the Redeemer and his goſpel. Their ſhame and miſery will certainly be in proportion to his glory and power as a Saviour and judge. It is the wrath of the Lamb; wrath infinite as his love, his ſufferings and his merit! ſtrange and intolerable! who can deſcribe or endure it; when the Lord ſhall deſcend from heaven, and the trumpet ſhall ſound, "Our God ſhall come, ſaith the prophet, a fire ſhall "devour before him, and it ſhall be very tempeſtuous "round about him; he ſhall call to the heaven above, "and to the earth, that he may judge his people; "and the heavens ſhall declare his righteouſneſs, for "God is judge himſelf." Hear then, O unbeliever, canſt thou ſtand before his indignation? canſt thou abide the fierceneſs of his anger; when his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him? art thou trampling under foot the blood of

the

the Son of God, or afraid or aſhamed to truſt and confeſs him now before men? How wilt thou endure to be dragged forth in the preſence of God and his angels, and trodden down among the wicked in the day of his wrath? No rocks or mountains ſhall be able to cover thee. O it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God for deſpite of his grace!

BUT I ſpeak to him that believes, and unto whom Jeſus is precious. And is it not matter of unſpeakable joy, as an excellent writer remarks, to one that loves Chriſt, 'that he is now exalted, glorified, and enthroned in an everlaſting and immoveable kingdom?' View, O Chriſtian, thy aſcended and glorified Saviour! The ſcene is opened in ſcripture for thine eyes to behold. Contemplate the dignity and power of him that endured the croſs and deſpiſed the ſhame for thy ſins. In vain the diſciples continued on Mount Olivet, gazing with their natural eyes up to the viſible heavens, through which their Lord was taken out of their ſight, and placed on the right hand of God; and for this they were juſtly reproved: But it is the wiſdom, duty and privilege of the chriſtian to uſe the eyes of his ſpiritual underſtanding, and through faith behold him that is inviſible, crowned with glory and honor, the Forerunner, Advocate, Prieſt and King of his people.

THE advantages that ariſe from a becoming attention to theſe things are many and great. The exaltation of Chriſt is to the glory of the Father. If we are duly affected with this divine proſpect, it will excite our praiſes to him, whoſe infinite power, faithfulneſs and

love, are illuſtriouſly diſplayed in raiſing up his Son Jeſus Chriſt. It will likewiſe poſſeſs us with reverence and eſteem for the Saviour himſelf, and make us bow with adoration, as in heaven they caſt down their crowns, before his preſence. This alſo reflects a glory on the Chriſtian profeſſion. What an honor to be a diſciple of Jeſus! Shall any refuſe to own him before men, who is thus highly exalted with God? Muſt not the man who claims a relation to ſo dignified an head, have reaſon to glory in his croſs, and with Moſes eſteem even the reproaches of Chriſt, yea and rejoice if he is counted worthy to ſuffer for his ſake? Bluſh then, O Reader, if conſcious that through fear of the ſcornful, or of any other trial, thou art neglecting his orders, and avoiding the open confeſſion to his name required in the goſpel! See Jeſus crowned on the throne in his heavenly kingdom! Behold the thouſands of thouſands that miniſter unto him, and the ten thouſand thouſands that ſtand before him. And canſt thou be aſhamed of him and his words in the face of his enemies, who are ſoon to be trodden under his feet?

AGAIN, ſhould not this confirm and enliven our hope in a dark and threatening ſeaſon? God raiſed up and glorified his Son, that our faith and hope might be in himſelf, 1 Pet. i. 21. Since Jeſus ſits at the right hand of the Father, until his foes are his footſtool, fear not, O Believer, he is able to ſave thee! And however the enemies of Chriſt and his goſpel may ſeem to prevail, and be ready to inſult, their triumph is ſhort, thy exalted Redeemer is daily advancing againſt them. It is indeed a cloudy day when the deluſions

luſions of Mahomet, or heathen idolatry, and groſs ſuperſtition, ſpread over ſo conſiderable a part of the earth; and eſpecialy if we add the abominations of Popery, the inſolence of Deiſts, and the abounding diſorders, and many unhappy diviſions where the name of chriſtianity is known: but in theſe ſad circumſtances we have this to comfort us, that the adverſaries of Zion are doomed to deſtruction. The Lord reigns, and they who oppoſe him muſt repent or be ruined. Theſe veſſels of wrath are permitted a while, but the day of vengeance is at hand, when all the enemies of Jeſus ſhall be covered with ſhame and periſh for ever.

FINALLY, Beloved, is the Saviour raiſed to this dignity in the heavens? With what freedom ſhould his people come to the throne of grace for every bleſſing, and particularly for the Holy Spirit of promiſe he hath received of the Father? Remember that he is thus exalted in public character, and in the name of his ſaints and that his bleſſed ſtate, is the earneſt and example of thine, who art virtually raiſed and ſet together with thy glorified Head: Therefore be of good courage in purſuing the victory given thee. "He is faithful that has "promiſed," ſaying, "To him that overcometh will I "grant to ſit with me in my throne, even as I alſo "overcame and am ſet down with my Father in his "throne," Rev. iii. 21.

The End of the Firſt Book.

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.

BOOK II.

BEING

Some thoughts on the apoſtle's improvement and application of his diſcourſe to the Jews on the day of Pentecoſt.

LECTURE VIII.

Containing the apoſtle's addreſs to his audience in general. His punctual deſcription of the Saviour. The charge of his murder on the Jews repeated. An earneſt exhortation to conſider him as the LORD's Chriſt; and the convictions which naturally reſult from ſuch a perſuaſion.

PETER having largely proved, by undeniable teſtimony and reaſoning out of the ſcriptures, the aſcenſion and glory of Jeſus, cloſes his excellent ſermon with a lively application which ſtands on record, and runs in theſe terms, "Therefore let all the houſe "of Iſrael know aſſuredly, that God hath made that "ſame Jeſus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and "Chriſt," Acts ii. 36.

THE

THE words are plainly an inference by way of reflection, in which this great preacher manifeſtly calls upon his audience, without exception, to conſider what he had been ſaying, and to apply the ſame for their conviction, that they might no longer reject the counſel of God againſt themſelves, but believe and be ſaved. Thus the apoſtle winds up his diſcourſe. And this is the end and method of preaching, owned of God, for the converſion of ſinners. A glorious inſtance of which is before us. It appears from ver. 14, that the apoſtle ſtood up and delivered himſelf in an earneſt and audible manner becoming the occaſion; and there is reaſon to ſuppoſe that his fervency rather increaſed than declined. No doubt, in proclaiming theſe words, he lift up his voice like a trumpet, and with great boldneſs and zeal ſtretched forth his hands and preſſed home the conſideration of the things he had ſpoken, on the hearts and conſciences of his hearers. The particulars to be noted in this ſacred paragraph are, the objects addreſſed, the truth which the apoſtle advances, and his earneſt exhortation to lay it to heart. I ſhall conſider each in its order; point out the convictions that muſt ariſe from a cordial perſuaſion of what is aſſerted, and then cloſe with a word or two by way of improvement. And,

Firſt, THE proclamation is to the houſe of Iſrael, i. e. the people of the Jews, ſo denominated from their anceſtor Jacob, ſirnamed Iſrael; the Lord's people, whom he brought out of Egypt, a choſen ſeed from

the loins of Abraham, by Iſaac and Jacob, with whom God eſtabliſhed his covenant. This people, whoſe number was great, are ſtiled the houſe of Iſrael, Jacob or Iſrael being the immediate parent of the twelve patriarchs from whom the multitude ſprang; who at length proſpered into a kingdom, a peculiar treaſure unto the Lord. Many and great were their privileges; and for a ſeaſon their renown went forth among the heathen for beauty. Unto them belonged the oracles of God; and with them were the ordinances of the ſanctuary, in the midſt of whom Jehovah dwelt, while they obeyed his voice and kept his covenant. But, alas, being a ſtiff-necked and perverſe generation, they ſoon and frequently corrupted themſelves to their ruin. And at this time they were in a moſt deplorable condition; for being left of God, whoſe wrath was impending, they became vain in their imagination, and were in a manner univerſally blinded; but ſtill there was among them a remnant, according to the election of grace, Rom. xi. 5. And God had not caſt away his people whom he foreknew: Nevertheleſs we find that Peter's addreſs is to all this houſe of Iſrael. This affords an example of preaching to the end of the world. If a miniſter's idea of the Father's election ſtraitens him in his report of the goſpel, ſo that he cannot moſt earneſtly beſeech every hearer of the word, with an ardent deſire after his ſaving acquaintance with Chriſt, he ſeems under ſome unhappy miſtake about this glorious doctrine of grace. Secret things belong unto God; and there is nothing revealed concerning his counſel, which

is a juſt exception to our addreſſes and prayers, yea and our warmeſt pleadings with each individual, that he receive not the grace of God in vain. Not the *unknown elect*, but *known ſinners*, are the immediate objects of a goſpel-miniſtry, in reſpect of its general report. It is true, the great end of this commiſſion from heaven is the gathering the choſen and redeemed of the Lord: And this will be the view of him that is employed. Conſtraiued by the love of Chriſt, his miniſters are animated to patience and diligence, and, with the apoſtle, "can endure all things for the elect's ſake, "that they may obtain the ſalvation which is in him, "with eternal glory," 2 Tim. ii. 10. Nevertheleſs, the Lord knoweth them that are his. And a ſervant of Jeſus hath not, nor can he have any rational or warrantable ground for reſpect of perſons in his miniſtry, but is to preach the word indefinitely; and labour, if by any means, every one may repent and receive remiſſion of ſins, and by ſubmitting himſelf to the Lord, obtain life eternal. This is the example of Peter. Indeed he was the apoſtle of the circumciſion, and ſent to the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael, and therefore applies himſelf directly to the Jews, among whom he knew there was a choſen ſeed; yet his exhortation is univerſaly extended: "Let all the houſe of Iſrael know." Nor have we any reaſon to doubt but that his heart's deſire, like that of Paul for Iſrael was, (without exception) that they might be ſaved. That man who doth not ſincerely deſire, and earneſtly endeavour after the final happineſs of all who attend him, and accordingly direct his diſcourſe to the heart and conſcience of every hearer, ſeems

under a prejudice, and comes ſhort of the ſample given of thoſe who preached the word from the beginning.

Secondly, THE truth the apoſtle remonſtrates to theſe unbelievers for ſubſtance is this, namely, that Jeſus was the Chriſt, the Son of God, and the King of Iſrael; or, as he himſelf on a certain occaſion confeſſed, ſaying, "Thou art Chriſt the Son of the living "God," John vi. 69. He declares and urgeth it upon them, that "God hath made that ſame Jeſus whom "ye have crucified, both Lord and Chriſt." Note,

1. HIS punctual deſcription of the Meſſiah, "That "ſame Jeſus." It is of great importance to know the perſon of the Saviour, not indeed in a natural way or after the fleſh, as the Jews knew him when they crucified and ſlew him, or as the apoſtles diſcerned him alive from the dead, and thereby became qualified, as we have ſeen, to witneſs his reſurrection. Henceforth Chriſt is no more known after this manner; but a ſpiritual knowledge of his perſon is needful to a cordial dependence upon him. A man may truſt him that is *unſeen*, but no man can depend on an object *unknown:* And accordingly we find that an underſtanding in the perſon of Chriſt is given to them that believe: "He hath "given us an underſtanding in him that is true," John v. 20. The apoſtle's deſign is not only to convince the Jews of their guilt, but likewiſe to ſhew them, that in this ſame Jeſus, and in no other, ſalvation is found, and this with a view to their converſion. In like manner every true believer knows who the Lord's Chriſt

is;

is; he hath a true underſtanding in the perſon of his Redeemer; nor will any faith ſupport its ſubject in an hour of temptation, and eſpecially in the views of eternity, but that which is accompanied with a certain knowledge of him in whom his confidence is placed: But the chriſtian is abundantly ſatisfied in this, and therefore can rejoice, as the apoſtle, when his departure is at hand, and ſay, "I know whom I have believed, and "I am perſuaded that he is able to keep that which I "have committed unto him againſt that day," 2 Tim. i. 12. The faithful are not alike in the degrees of their knowledge, but each believer hath a true acquaintance with him whom he truſts; he is ſo far enlightened as to know and be perſuaded that his Saviour is the Son of the living God. If the experience of the ſaints in this point of knowledge is ſubſtantially the ſame, which cannot with reaſon be doubted, then according to the paſſage in John before mentioned, they all know that the Son of God is come, i. e. was manifeſted in the fleſh, and that this his Son Jeſus Chriſt is the true God and eternal life. This knowledge includes a true idea of the conſtitution of his wonderful perſon, as God-man; for though an ordinary chriſtian, at leaſt ſome ſuch, may not be clearly led into every circumſtance relating to the ineffable union of theſe infinitely diſtant natures in the perſon of the Meſſiah, or be capable of diſcourſing with judgment on this ſublime ſubject, yet the faith of God's people is ſo grounded in the perſon of their Redeemer, that it cannot exiſt without a true acquaintance therewith. His deity and humanity are therefore known to believers, the leaſt of whom is perſuaded that Jeſus is Immanuel, "God with us;" and he is likewiſe

wiſe confident of this, that his Saviour is that ſame Jeſus who ſuffered without the gates of Jeruſalem, even the ſelf-ſame perſon who was crucified at Mount Calvary. This is what Peter points out in the ſtrongeſt manner to his hearers, that he, whom God hath made both Lord and Chriſt, is that ſame Jeſus, even that ſelf-ſame individual perſon whom they had ſlain on the croſs, and no other. And this knowledge is contained in the faith of the choſen. But,

2. OBSERVE with what freedom he repeats his charge on theſe-Jeruſalem ſinners: "Whom ye have crucified." This indeed may be conſidered as a part of the deſcription given of the Lord's Chriſt; but I apprehend that the apoſtle had a further view. He ſeems to be exceedingly earneſt after their repentance; and therefore to awaken, them takes the opportunity of rehearſing their crime, that being deeply convinced of their horrid and inexpreſſible guilt, they might on due encouragement be prepared to look on him whom they had pierced, and mourn. This goſpel-miniſter longed after the converſion of his hearers, and would fain have them ſee their wretched condition, and the eternal miſery before them, that they might flee to Jeſus, and eſcape wrath to come. And in this he purſued the counſel of God with reſpect to many that heard him, as appears by the ſequel, to the joy and ſurprize of this faithful ſervant of the Lord, who, it is highly probable, little expected the glorious harveſt he reaped in the end; but of that in its place. Sinners are for the moſt part hardened in unbelief, and have need to be told again and again of their evil; and

affectionate

affectionate miniſters, who watch for their ſouls, will repeat their remonſtrances with a view to convince them; they will cry aloud, and ſpare not to ſhew unto them their tranſgreſſions and their ſins, that if God peradventure ſhould awaken them to a ſenſe of their folly and danger, and give them repentance unto the acknowledgement of the truth, they may recover themſelves and be plucked as brands from the fire. Thus Peter having ſet forth the glory and power of the exalted Saviour, fixes the attention of the Jews on him, whom they had crucified, as the Lord's Chriſt, ſhewing that he was no other than that ſelf-ſame perſon whom they had deſpiſed and wickedly murdered. This their blood-guiltineſs he repeats, and as it were rings in their ears, that, being duly and deeply affected with their ruined ſtate, they might repent and be ſaved. We may juſtly admire the wiſdom, faithfulneſs and compaſſion of this great man of God. How worthy the imitation of all unto whom is committed the goſpel of peace, and the care of immortal ſouls! O that ſuch preachers abounded! Once more,

3. We are to note the poſitive manner in which the apoſtle declares the authority of Jeſus. He aſſerts it with the utmoſt boldneſs and confidence. This is no conjecture, however probable, but a certain undeniable fact. He, that ſame Jeſus whom ye have crucified, is made, and made by God, both Lord and Chriſt. To be made is to be created or conſtituted by authority. So was Jeſus to the office of Mediator, unto which theſe characters belong. He was made by the Father from whom he received his authority; it

it was he called and created him in the eternal counſel of peace. Hence Iſa. xlii. 1. "Behold my ſervant "whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my ſoul de- "lighteth." And again, "I was ſet up from ever- "laſting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was." Prov. viii. 23. And accordingly our Lord, John xvii. 5, ſpeaks of a glory which he had with the Father before the world was. So then Jeſus was ordained and ſet up in the high office of Mediator, not upon his incarnation, but from the beginning, even from everlaſting was he made, by a ſpecial conſtitution according to the infinite wiſdom of God, that he might accompliſh the purpoſe of his grace in bringing many ſons to glory; and with this ſtands connected his appointment to a kingdom, unto which the Father ſtood engaged to exalt him when he had finiſhed his work upon earth. Thus was he created to this dignity and power in the covenant of redemption before the foundation of the world. But to be made ſignifieth more than to be appointed, ordained or conſtituted: it may intend alſo his being manifeſt or openly inveſted with authority; and from the ſcope of the place, we are led to conſider it here in this ſenſe. The apoſtle plainly deſigns that God had actually and evidently inveſted Jeſus with the majeſty and power which belonged to the Meſſiah, as propheſied of old, and that now he was undoubtedly and viſibly both Lord and Chriſt. It remains to conſider,

Thirdly, THE apoſtle's ſolemn and earneſt exhortation to receive the truth in their heart. "Let all the houſe "of Iſrael know aſſuredly." To know aſſuredly is

to

to be perſuaded without heſitation: And by this phraſe, Peter doth not ſo much report the truth as ſtir up the Jews to embrace it. When the princes of the earth ſend forth their heralds with a 'be it known unto all 'men,' every man is called upon, not barely to hear or credit the report, but alſo and chiefly to conſider and obey it; it is an authoritative ſentence demanding the aſſent, perſuaſion and conformity of their ſubjects: In like manner, this goſpel-miniſter, having proved that Jeſus was the Chriſt and Lord of all, in his name calls with authority on theſe men of Iſrael to a ſure belief and full perſuaſion of what he had declared him to be, and a ſubmiſſion to him as ſuch. q. d. 'O ye 'men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jeruſalem, 'harden not your hearts, do not perverſely reject this 'word of ſalvation. Lo, that ſame Jeſus whom ye 'crucified, God hath raiſed up, whereof we are all 'witneſſes, and ſo is the Holy Ghoſt, in this which 'ye now ſee and hear. He is therefore doubtleſs exalt-'ed. No longer queſtion his power in heaven and 'earth, but aſſure yourſelves that this ſame Jeſus is 'indeed both Lord and Chriſt.'

THIS practical knowledge and credit, demanded by the apoſtle on the evidence given, is of the operation of God. It is not indeed truly and properly or at leaſt not the whole of ſaving faith, by which the ſubject as a loſt ſinner, encouraged by the promiſe of free and rich grace, being aſſiſted by the Spirit, truſts his ſoul in the hands of the almighty Redeemer, and relieth upon him for life; yet ſurely this perſuaſion cometh of him that calleth the ſaints, and is owing to a divine

agency

agency. When the goſpel comes not in word only but in power, and in the Holy Ghoſt, then it comes, ſaith the apoſtle, in much aſſurance, and iſſues in converſion, 1 Theſſ. i. 5. The native blindneſs and perverſe unbelief, under which the natural man is held, will not permit him to entertain this full perſuaſion of the authority of the glorified Jeſus: and with reſpect to the Jews, who had been guilty of his blood, they were highly prejudiced, and under the ſtrongeſt temptations, to diſown him whoſe vengeance they had reaſon to dread, if inveſted with power; ſo that all the force of the apoſtle's reaſoning muſt have been inſufficient without the intervention of his divine arm, who can open the heart at his pleaſure; and accordingly we find that, though many believed through grace, yet it ſeems the far greater part of his numerous audience remained unperſuadeable and obeyed not the truth. Many are convinced from external evidence, that the ſcriptures are true; they are morally perſuaded of their veracity, and credit what they relate, and conſequently believe in this ſenſe, that Jeſus of Nazareth who was crucified, revived, aſcended to glory, and ſits at the right hand of God; but, alas, what is their knowledge! It is all ſuperficial and heartleſs; they dread not his wrath, nor deſire his ſalvation; they are not affected with the goſpel-report, "He that be-"lieveth ſhall be ſaved, and he that believeth not "ſhall be damned." A general notion of being ſaved by Chriſt, without any regard to an experience of ſincere repentance and faith, tends only to prove the ſubject under a ſingular and dangerous hardneſs; but where a full and cordial perſuaſion of the power of

Jeſus,

Jeſus, as the Lord's Chriſt, to ſave his people and to deſtroy his enemies takes place, the ſubject will feel a painful concern about his own eternal welfare, and be ready to cry out, as in the inſtance before us, What muſt I do? or "What ſhall I do to be ſaved?" And this will appear when we conſider, as propoſed, the convictions that muſt ariſe from ſuch a perſuaſion. And,

1. A perſuaſion of this will convince the ſubject that Chriſt is a Saviour indeed. On the birth of Jeſus, you know, the angel declared to the ſhepherds, ſaying, "Unto you is born in the city of David, this day, a "Saviour, which is Chriſt the Lord," Luke ii. 11. To the ſame purpoſe ſaith Paul, "Of this man's, i. e. "David's ſeed, hath God, according to his promiſe, "raiſed unto Iſrael a Saviour, Jeſus," Acts xiii. 23. Thus if God hath truly made this ſame Jeſus both Lord and Chriſt, he is ſurely a Saviour mighty and great: His power, dignity, and all-ſufficiency are not to be queſtioned. It is for want of believing from the heart this divine authority of Jeſus, that any diſtruſt or deſpiſe him. If a man is poſſeſſed of this knowledge of faith, that God hath indeed inveſted Jeſus Chriſt with all power in heaven and earth, he muſt be convinced that he is able to anſwer his character. And under this conviction, he would certainly either fear his indignation or truſt in his name. Where this conviction takes place, there can be no diſpute, no, not a moment's heſitation, but that Jeſus is able to ſave them that come to God by him, and that all others, who obey not

not the goſpel, ſhall be accounted his enemies and made his footſtool. Again,

2. This perſuaſion will alſo convince a man that Jeſus is the only Saviour. There cannot be two of this ſupreme dignity. If this ſame Jeſus is Lord and Chriſt, there can be no other. Some modern Jews, being preſſed with the evidence of the ſufferings and death of Jeſus of Nazareth, as exactly and fully anſwering the propheſies concerning the Meſſiah, in order to uphold their vain expectation of one yet to come, have invented to themſelves a notion of their being two of that character, one to ſuffer, another to reign, or to ſave and deliver them. This vain conceit, as one juſtly ſtiles it, ſhews their perverſe unbelief, and how miſerably blinded and hardened they are! O when ſhall the veil be taken away! but nothing can be more falſe and abſurd, being deſtitute of reaſon and contrary to ſcripture: "There is but one Mediator between "God and man, the man Chriſt Jeſus," 1 Tim. ii. 5. And whoever conſiders that office, and the manner in which it is executed, will find that there can be only one of this diſtinguiſhing character. He only who being made perfect through ſufferings, became the author of eternal ſalvation, lives at the right hand of God, to deliver his people and bring them to glory. In the nature of the thing there can be but one whom God hath exalted to this dignity: He therefore who aſſuredly knoweth that Jeſus is that perſon who ſuſtains this power by divine authority, muſt be convinced of what Peter declares, Acts iv. 11. namely, "that ſal-"vation is in no other, neither is there any name under

" under heaven given among men whereby we muſt be " ſaved." It follows,

3. THAT from this knowledge in the heart, there will ariſe a conviction that every man muſt either periſh under the adminiſtration of Jeſus, or be ſaved by his blood. He that is aſſured in his mind, that God hath made Jeſus both Lord and Chriſt, and that conſequently he is the all-ſufficient and only Saviour and judge, being conſcious of his own guilt, cannot fail of ſeeing, that without a ſubmiſſion to and intereſt in him, he ſhall certainly periſh. Hence this knowledge will prove effectual to render the ſubject anxious about his eternal ſtate, ſo as to become an earneſt enquirer after obtaining this ſalvation, being ſenſible of his danger, and diſtreſſed in his ſoul while in a ſtate of uncertainty. Thus the word coming with power unto many of theſe Jeruſalem-ſinners, they were immediately convinced of their miſery and danger; and being pricked in the heart, with the utmoſt eagerneſs and anguiſh of ſpirit, they ſay unto Peter, and to the reſt of the apoſtles, " Men " and brethren, What ſhall we do?"

LECTURE IX.

Being notes and reflections on Peter's proclamation and addreſs in the cloſe of his ſermon to the Jews.

IN the foregoing lecture we conſidered the winding up of the apoſtle's diſcourſe at Jeruſalem: It conſiſts in a remonſtance, by way of reflection, in which he excites his audience, the Jews, to conſider the reſult of what he had proved concerning Jeſus of Nazareth whom they had crucified; and calleth upon them, in a moſt ſolemn and earneſt manner, to "know aſſuredly" that God had made that ſame Jeſus both Lord and Chriſt. A perſuaſion of this, we have ſeen, muſt needs convince the ſubject that Chriſt is a Saviour *indeed*, and the *only* Saviour of ſinners; and conſequently that he is undone without an intereſt in him. Such was the effect of Peter's exhortation, by the bleſſing of God, on many of his hearers. Now this being the firſt ſermon publicly preached in the name of the Lord after his aſcenſion, it is doubtleſs the moſt primitive pattern of preaching; we are therefore naturally led to turn our thoughts on thoſe points which more immediately concern that divine inſtitution; in reference to which the following particulars deſerve our attention.

I. THAT

1. THAT the conſtitution and authority of Jeſus, in the character of Meſſiah, is a principal ſubject of the goſpel-miniſtry. The divine authority of Jeſus is of the utmoſt importance; without a full ſatisfaction herein no man can truſt him: The leaſt heſitation in this point leaves the ſubject incapable of embracing a crucified Redeemer; for he that is in good earneſt about his ſalvation, will never confide in one whoſe authority is doubtful. Our Saviour declares, concerning his diſciples, ſaying to his Father, "I have given them the "words which thou gaveſt me, and they have received "them, and have known ſurely that I came out from "thee, and they have believed that thou didſt ſend "me," John xvii. 8. A full aſſurance of his divine miſſion was the ground of their confidence in him: In like manner he that receives the word of the goſpel into his heart, and comes to Chriſt for life, comes to him under a full perſuaſion that God hath inveſted this ſame Jeſus, whom he truſts, with the power of a Saviour; without this there can be no faith, it being needful to awaken in the mind a due concern about an intereſt in Chriſt, and to engage a ſinner's dependence upon him: the apoſtle therefore, with great propriety, urges this point on the Jews, to convince them of their danger, and of the power of Jeſus to ſave, that they might not, through unbelief, periſh in their ſins. This example ſhould be followed by the miniſters of the goſpel; they are to be much employed in opening thoſe ſcriptures that relate to the Father's appointment of his Son to the office he bears, that their hearers, knowing that Jeſus is the Chriſt, and that he is exalted by the

right hand of God, to ſave or to deſtroy, may ſee the the infinite importance of an intereſt in him, and be encouraged to truſt him. In this way faith comes by hearing, through the power of the Holy Ghoſt, by poſſeſſing the ſubject, with an evidence to his conſcience that Jeſus is indeed the Lord's Chriſt, and able to ſave to the utermoſt them who come unto God by him: In want of which conviction, ſome hearers of the word, with their heads full of orthodox notions, ſeem careleſs, and are little concerned about repentance unto life; but where this knowledge reacheth the heart, a man will not content himſelf ſhort of being ſafe in this only and almighty Lord and Saviour of ſinners. This being the ſtate of the caſe, moſt certainly it is a capital branch of a preacher's buſineſs, to lay open the counſel of God in the conſtitution of his Son.

AGAIN, we may note, that it becomes the miniſters of Chriſt to exhort and excite them that hear, unto a believing application of the things that are ſpoken. Peter, you ſee, having proved from ſcripture the dignity and power of the aſcended Redeemer, cloſes his ſermon in a warm and lively addreſs to the Jews; whereby he labours to convince them of the glory of Chriſt as Lord of all, and as the anointed of God, that being duly affected with his authority and grace, they might believe on him unto life everlaſting. If this may be deemed an example, it is not unbecoming the miniſters of the word to go farther than a bare, however judicious report of the things which belong to the goſpel of Chriſt, and proceed to open the counſel of God, and to excite their audience to conſider

conſider the reality and importance of what they have heard, that being fully perſuaded, they may believe and be ſaved. The ſcriptures abound with the like ſamples of preaching; and indeed, ſo dull are mankind, that the warmeſt addreſſes to the heart and conſcience are needful as a means of awakening perſons to apply the word to themſelves: and accordingly we find this account from the great apoſtle of the Gentiles, "Now then, ſays he, we are ambaſſadors for Chriſt, "as though God did beſeech you by us; we pray "you in Chriſt's ſtead, be ye reconciled to God," 2 Cor. v. 20. Nothing I think can be more evident, than that theſe firſt and great preachers did not leave the people in a cold and lifeleſs manner, or without attempting to affect their hearts with what they delivered.

I am ſenſible, that while ſome have little regard to the judgment of their hearers, and make the paſſions a firſt and principal object of addreſs, ſome others have condemned all endeavours to touch the affections, and would confine the preacher to a naked expoſition, or bare report of the truth, with its evidence from ſcripture; applications are repreſented as ſavouring of the creatures ability, yea and as intruding on the work of the Spirit, whoſe office, ſay they, is to apply his own grace. To obviate this prejudice, I ſhall endeavour briefly to ſhew the propriety of addreſſing the conſciences of men, according to this original pattern, and its conſiſtency with the ſpiritual impotence of fallen man, and conſequently with the abſolute need of a divine agency, in order to his ſaving advantage.

To ſtir up the hearers of the word by way of reflection, and to uſe every ſober means of perſuaſion, whereby, under the bleſſing of God, their hearts may be affected with the truth, to the profit of their ſouls, is not only ſuited to the nature of man, but alſo exactly agrees with the method of our Lord and his apoſtles; and if, as hath been complained, any are unguarded, and ſeemingly inconſiſtent with a juſt idea of the truth, in attempting to copy the example, can this be a ſufficient excuſe for laying aſide or rejecting the natural and ancient means of edification? nor is the agency of the Spirit, in an effectual application of the goſpel, a cogent objection to the preacher's addreſſing the conſcience of his hearer; unleſs it be admitted againſt expounding of the ſcriptures to enlighten his underſtanding; for except a man is taught of God, he is incapable of diſcerning the things of his Spirit: So that on this pretence, all kind of preaching may be cenſured as uſeleſs, and indeed every means of knowledge and conviction refuſed, ſince there is no branch of the miniſtry, the ſucceſs of which doth not abſolutely depend on the power of the Holy Ghoſt: But moral endeavours to inform the judgment, and to touch the hearts of a chriſtian audience, are equally juſt, agreeable to the teſtimony of God, and perfectly conſiſtent with the office of the Spirit, who alone can effectually teach the children of men.

VARIOUS are the talents of preachers, and alſo the occaſions and circumſtances which may occur in the courſe of their miniſtry. Theſe, with their diſpoſition under

under the guidance of the Spirit, who directs the hearts of his ſervants at his pleaſure, hath a prevailing influence in the method they take in diſcourſing on the kingdom of God; nor do I more than recommend the inſtance before us as, what I apprehend, a genuine ſtandard of preaching; I hope this may be allowed, and eſpecially ſince it pleaſed the Lord to honor the pattern with ſo great and wonderful ſucceſs,

THE example is clear. Peter preaching to the Jews, proves from the ſcripture, that he whom they had crucified, and who was raiſed from the dead, was indeed the Meſſiah foretold by the prophets; and having ſo done, though his audience conſiſted of the moſt hardened and guilty perſons, who, in all appearance, were held under the power of ſin and unbelief, he winds up his diſcourſe in an affectionate addreſs to this obſtinate and periſhing multitude, calling on all, and every one to reflect on the things he had ſpoken. In this cloſing application he evidently points out a plain truth, which reſults from the conſideration of what he had alledged, namely, that this ſame Jeſus was manifeſtly both Lord and Chriſt, and earneſtly beſeeches them to receive it. In like manner our Lord himſelf, and the diſciples he ſent in the courſe of his life, laboured to convince thoſe who attended their miniſtry. It appears from the ſacred hiſtory, that they went forth expounding the ſcriptures, to open the underſtanding and rectify the judgment of their hearers; and from thence proceeded to infer, exhort and excite them, that, through grace, the doctrines they taught, being mixed with faith, might be duly

applied and reduced to experience and practice. This method alſo runs through the whole apoſtolic miniſtration; and though, as obſerved, there will be a great variety in the manner of preachers, I cannot but think that way which conſiſts with this general plan moſt agreeable to the deſign of a goſpel-miniſtry, which is to irradiate the underſtanding, and likewiſe to affect the heart, both which are needful. To aim at moving the paſſions, without informing the judgment, or a full perſuaſion of the truth; and on the other hand to reſt in a bare report of the doctrines revealed in the bible, in a neglect of perſonal application and addreſſing the conſciences of men, that they may be ſuitably impreſſed with the things that are ſpoken, ſeem equally wrong; the one has a tendency to flatter perſons with an hope grounded in their own imaginations rather than the teſtimony of God, which is vain; and the other to fill them with a conceit of themſelves, on account of their notions of the goſpel, without any regard to the fruits of that faith which is of the operation of God: In each caſe the ſubject deceives himſelf; and therefore whatever tends to cheriſh either, ſhould be avoided as unfriendly to the intereſt of real religion. In a word, from the ſtate of the natural man, and from univerſal experience, it is clear, that the moſt judicious explanations or fervent addreſſes, which the ableſt preacher on earth can deliver, are inſufficient of themſelves to enlighten or enlarge the mind of a hearer. And with me it is no leſs certain, that from the beginning, the miniſters of Chriſt, by reaſoning out of the ſcriptures, and by a particular and earneſt

neſt application to their audience, ſought to convince them and bring them to the obedience of faith. Once more,

3. THIS inſtance proves that goſpel-miniſters ſhould, under no pretence whatever decline their utmoſt endeavours to convert any perſon or people, however notorious their infidelity and wickedneſs. It may be uſeful to conſider this point, leſt by any means our own carnal reaſon and fooliſh miſtakes give the enemy advantage, through a neglect of the ſouls committed to our charge in a private or public capacity. If ſingular hardneſs, infidelity and guilt, rendered the ſhameful ſubjects unmeet for the attempts of a goſpel-miniſter, Peter had never taken ſuch pains to awaken and convince theſe blood-guilty ſinners. Men, who, in contempt of all the miraculous and undeniable teſtimony from heaven, in favour of the holy Jeſus, notwithſtanding the light and conviction they had received concerning his being a man approved of God, yet for envy in malice betrayed and murdered him; men that were hardened in their infidelity, and had no remorſe for this great wickedneſs, but continued to reſiſt the Holy Ghoſt, inſomuch, as that many of them had been mocking at his extraordinary gifts; I ſay, the apoſtle would not have laboured to convince theſe ſeemingly abandoned tranſgreſſors, if the vileſt of men were to be left in deſpair. When the deſcendents of thoſe who fear God, caſt away the cords of a religious education, or when ſuch, in whom convictions have been raiſed, quench the light they have received, and become openly licentious and wicked, having turned

their

their backs on the ways of God, or it may be ſet their mouths and faces againſt heaven, their conſciences ſeem to be ſeared, and their condition is truly deplorable and dangerous, we may well tremble for them, leſt, being given up of God, they finally reject his counſel to their ruin! Nevertheleſs their caſe is not deſperate, neither are even ſuch to be excluded from the means of ſalvation.

CHRIST came to ſave ſinners; nor is any ſinner beyond the reach of his arm. The miniſtration of his word therefore waits the pleaſure and power of God without reſpect of perſons. A deſpiſed goſpel indeed hath been taken away, and the candleſtick removed out of his place. Hence a famine of hearing the word of the Lord, and the people periſh for lack of knowledge, which is awful to conſider; but where the kingdom of heaven is continued, no degree of infidelity or wickedneſs ſhould diſcourage or prevent the miniſters of Jeſus from ſtriving after the converſion of men. No nation under heaven was ever more corrupt and guilty than the Jews at this time, and eſpecially the inhabitants of their capital city; and yet we find the diſciples went forth, as the Lord had commanded, and preached repentance and remiſſion of ſins in his name, beginning at Jeruſalem, as in the inſtance before us. And ſhall it ever be thought that any man's wickedneſs can render him unmeet for the miniſtry of the goſpel?

IT is wrong then to ſay of this or the other perſon, he is ſo hardened in unbelief, and a wretch ſo abandoned

ed to his luſts, that it is in vain to reaſon with him on ſin, or righteouſneſs, or judgment to come, or to declare unto him the power and glory of Jeſus. This ſavours of ignorance, ſelf-ſufficiency, and a diſtruſt of that power which alone can ſubdue the tranſgreſſor: Is the divine arm ſhortened that it cannot ſave? Shall man determine the counſel of God, or ſet bounds to his grace? When under any temptation we think or ſpeak thus, do we not forget the ſucceſs which attended the preaching of the goſpel, even among thoſe who murdered the Saviour, that the veſſels of mercy are unknown to us, and that the converſion of a ſinner is by the power of God, accompanying the perſuaſion of the preacher?

In ſhort, the miniſtration of the goſpel proceeds on thoſe principles which warrant and oblige, yea, and encourage thoſe who are employed therein to preach to, and plead with the greateſt tranſgreſſors, and moſt perverſe unbelievers, if peradventure God will grant them repentance to the acknowledgement of the truth. The vileſt ſinner, or the moſt obſtinate infidel is within the reach of omnipotent grace: The Lord's people ſhall be willing in the day of his power, and his ſervants ſhall find their labour ſhall not be in vain in him. But if any are permitted to harden themſelves to their deſtruction, faithful miniſters are unto God a ſweet ſavour of Chriſt in them that are ſaved and in them that periſh. To the one they are "a ſavour of "death unto death, and to the other a ſavour of life "unto life. And who is ſufficient for theſe things?" 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

THUS then, by the manner in which Peter finiſhed his famous and ſucceſsful diſcourſe to the Jews, we learn that the conſtitution and authority of Jeſus, in the character of the Meſſiah, is a principal ſubject of a goſpel-miniſtry; that it belongs to that miniſtration earneſtly to exhort and ſtir up all that hear, unto a believing application of the things that are ſpoken. And further, that the miniſters of Chriſt are not to withhold their endeavour after the converſion of the moſt notorious tranſgreſſors.

AND now, my dear Reader, permit me, after this noble example, to exhort and beſeech thee. Art thou careleſs and unconcerned about the ſalvation publiſhed in the goſpel? Know thou that this ſame Jeſus whom we preach, and who was crucified without the gates of Jeruſalem, is alive from the dead, and is made of God both Lord and Chriſt. O that thine heart was poſſeſſed of this aſſurance, and no longer capable of a moments eaſe without an intereſt in this only and almighty Saviour! Satan waits to ſuggeſt thoſe imaginations which may prevent the important conviction; and when it takes place, thy own carnal reaſon, and the ſeeds of infidelity, which grow in thy fleſh, will if poſſible extinguiſh it. But there is not the leaſt ground to heſitate that the Father hath indeed raiſed up his Son Jeſus, and ſet him at his own right hand, until his foes are his footſtool. The effuſion of the Spirit, the ſpread of the goſpel, the fearful deſtruction of the city and temple at Jeruſalem, and the preſent diſperſed ſtate of the Jews, are inconteſtible proofs that

Jeſus

Jeſus is exalted; and as ſure as he ever exiſted on earth, and is paſſed into heaven, ſo certain it is that he is the only Saviour, authorized of God to judge the quick and the dead at his appearance and kingdom. How miſerable then muſt thou be, if in the end thou art found among them who obey not the goſpel! It availed not theſe Jews to be of the houſe of Iſrael, neither will it ſtand thee in ſtead to be a nominal chriſtian, if thou art not a true worſhipper of Chriſt as thy Lord and Saviour. Deceive not thyſelf; the wrath of the Lamb will ſurely come down on all unbelievers and tear them to pieces. There is none to deliver. Thou wilt therefore find it a certain and eternal truth; it is the ſum of the goſpel, Mark xvi. 16. "He that believeth and is baptized ſhall be "ſaved, but he that believeth not ſhall be damned."

But haſt thou, Beloved, ſeen the Lord's Chriſt? and is he the object of thy truſt? How precious this truth! With reverence and joy behold this ſame Jeſus who died for thy ſins, and who deſpiſed the ſhame of the croſs, now openly inveſted and highly exalted univerſal Lord, thy Lord, and thy God! Fear not, though in many temptations, thy King is able to ſave thee; he lives to defend thee in life, to preſerve thee in death, and to bring thee ſafe to his heavenly kingdom. And is he thy Lord? Then worſhip thou him. Nothing can more loudly demand thy profeſſed ſubjection to goſpel-appointments. Haſt thou never yet publicly devoted thyſelf to Jeſus and confeſſed to his name? How canſt thou believe him made of the Father Lord and Chriſt, and withhold thy obedience,

or

or omit what he hath commanded? Doth thy conſcience accuſe thee of this? Bluſh and repent, think how ungrateful and preſumptuous it is to neglect the orders of thy Redeemer who is enthroned in the heavens, and before whom thou muſt ſhortly appear! Alſo hear what the Father ſaith, "Yet have I ſet my "King on my holy hill of Zion," Pſalm ii. 6. And attend to the honor he pays him, "Thy throne, O "God, is for ever and ever; a ſceptre of righteouſ-"neſs is the ſceptre of thy kingdom!" Heb. i. 8. And wilt thou not bow in the name of this Jeſus? or wilt thou refuſe to own his authority in the ſight of the world? Surely it becomes thee my Friend, to adore and ſerve thy dignified Saviour, "who is over all "God bleſſed for ever. Amen."

The End of the Second Book.

PRIMITIVE

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.

BOOK III.

IN WHICH

The wonderful ſucceſs of the apoſtle's firſt ſermon at Jeruſalem, is particularly conſidered and improved.

LECTURE X.

Shewing the ſtate of their hearts who fell under conviction. By what means they were awakened; and the method they took for relief.

ISAIAH complains, in reference to the Jews, ſaying, "Who hath believed our report?" Yet it was not in vain that the word of the Lord was preached at Jeruſalem. Peter had no ſooner finiſhed his diſcourſe, but, lo, many of his hearers appeared deeply affected, inſomuch that they cry out in the midſt of the aſſembly. Their acclamation was not like the ſound of enthuſiaſts, who, under a falſe impreſſion, have been ſometimes found to ſcream and toſs in a wild and frantic manner: No; but being awakened to a juſt ſenſe of their miſery, they make a ſober, though an earneſt and anxious enquiry ſuited to their deplorable condition. The account

count is as follows, and is recorded, Acts ii. 37. "Now when they had heard this, they were pricked "in their heart, and ſaid unto Peter, and to the reſt "of the apoſtles, Men and brethren, what ſhall we "do?"

In this hiſtorical paſſage an amazing ſcene is preſented; thouſands of ſinners awakened in an inſtant, alike ſmitten, as the Iſraelites in the wilderneſs; every one wounded, lifting up their voice, as one man, in the preſence of a multitude who attended the apoſtles. How aſtoniſhed the audience, to behold and to hear ſo many perſons, in the utmoſt diſtreſs, beſeeching his miniſters whom, but a few weeks before, they had crucified as an impoſtor! Here then is another external evidence to the men of Judea, proving the divine miſſion and glorious ſtate of Jeſus, in whoſe name the diſciples appeared. An extraordinary event this, attended with peculiar circumſtances: But the effects of God's grace are ſubſtantially the ſame in every ſubject of his power. One convinced ſinner may be more and longer terrified under a ſenſe of his guilt than another; but no real penitent is altogether a ſtranger to the diſtreſs which filled the hearts of theſe Jews; he is not without a taſte of this ſorrow: And every convert has been compelled, as it were, to the ſame enquiry: in anſwer to which, he has by ſome means been led to the Saviour, and found reſt for his ſoul. May no one, employed in reading theſe papers, be finally unacquainted with that ſpiritual trouble which is needful to bring

bring him to Chriſt, and to prepare him for a joyful reception of the goſpel!

It may be uſeful to conſider the painful ſtate of theſe awakened tranſgreſſors; by what means they were convinced and became thus diſtreſſed; and the method they took for relief: particulars which lead to the experience and practice of thoſe in whom the word is the power of God to ſalvation.

Their condition was truly deplorable: "They "were pricked in the heart." A ſore caſe indeed, and grievous beyond all expreſſion! The heart taken ſpiritually, and it cannot here be underſtood in a natural ſenſe, is often comprehenſive of all the powers and faculties of the ſoul, as when it is ſaid, "Truſt in the "Lord with all thine heart." And again, "With the "heart man believeth unto righteouſneſs." But in this paſſage, as in many other places, it ſeems confined to the conſcience. Thus it is written, 2 Sam. xxiv. 10. that "David's heart, i. e. his conſcience ſmote him when he had "numbered the people," as appears from his confeſſion: "He ſaid unto the Lord, I have ſinned greatly in that "I have done." And the word is thus taken, 1 John iii. 21. "If our hearts condemn us not, i. e. "if we have the teſtimony of a good conſcience, we "have boldneſs, &c." In like manner ſays Job, chap. xvii. 6. "My heart ſhall not reproach me as "long as I live." Conſcience in the ſoul of man is a kind of vice-judge; and, except in an obdurate ſtate, it is ever accuſing or excuſing the ſubject, Rom. ii. 15. It may lie dormant a ſeaſon, but will ſurely awake, and

with a terrible voice bear witneſs againſt the tranſgreſſor. Thus, in the inſtance before us; Peter having charged upon the Jews the murder of Chriſt, through a divine power it entered the conſcience of many, who were touched to the quick, inſomuch, that while he reaſoned with them out of the ſcriptures, his words became as drawn ſwords, and pierced through their ſouls. Thus the word of God, however unaffected men hardened in unbelief may be, when it comes with the energy of the Holy Ghoſt, "is quick and power-"ful, ſharper than any two-edged ſword, piercing "even to the dividing aſunder ſoul and ſpirit," Heb. iv. 12. So theſe Jeruſalem-ſinners found it, whoſe wounds are moſt emphatically expreſſed by a word no where elſe uſed in all the New-Teſtament, Κατενύγησαν, it ſignifies to vex, rend, or punctually wound, as if a man was pierced to the centre of his heart with an arrow or ſpear; yea ſome illuſtrate the term, by ſuppoſing the ſharp points of many poiſoned daggers or ſcorpion-ſtrings all at once faſtened in the heart, in the moſt cruel manner that can be deviſed. Thus ſorely and punctually wounded were theſe ſinful men: and this ſtriking expreſſion imports the following articles:

1. THAT their convictions were deep and effectual. It was no ſuperficial or tranſitory impreſſion, neither were they merely cut to the heart, as the Phariſees were under another ſermon by the ſame apoſtle, chap. v. 33. or like thoſe at the reproof of Stephen the martyr, chap. vii. 54. in both which places, διεπριοντο, a very different word is uſed, in which there is an alluſion

ſion to a ſaw that tears and hacks rather than pierces, and fitly repreſents thoſe convictions, which, however painful while they continue, leave the ſubject under the power of ſin, and rather irritate than mortify the fleſh. There is a material difference between being *cut to*, and *pricked in* the heart; the one ſets the ſubject a raging, whereas the other engages him to repentance. And accordingly we find, that thoſe affected in the former way, ſought revenge on the apoſtles who reproved them; they took counſel to ſlay them, gnaſhed with their teeth, and even ſtoned righteous Stephen: On the contrary, in the inſtance before us, we ſee that theſe men, ſelf-condemned, and perſuaded of the authority of Jeſus, with the higheſt eſteem of his miniſters, unanimouſly addreſs them as the ſervants of God to ſhew them the way of ſalvation. They were deeply and painfully convinced, but they were not offended, as ſome, with their teachers: No; they appear humble and contrite; ſenſible of their own vileneſs, they were ready to periſh under a fearful expectation of the wrath of the Lamb they had ſlain: and if they had any indignation it was againſt themſelves, and not againſt thoſe that were the inſtruments of poſſeſſing them with a ſenſe of their guilt. This was their caſe: they were pricked in the heart—the arrows of the Almighty ſtuck in them—the words of the preacher, by the power of God, entered deep and faſtened in their conſcience—under which they cry out for direction how they ſhall eſcape. No wonder that,

2. THEIR pains were exquiſite. Anguiſh aroſe from theſe deep and powerful convictions. This, we have ſeen, is a principal idea of the word. No language can fully deſcribe the torments of being wounded in the manner implied in this term. The acute ſenſations that ariſe from being pierced in the vitals, or moſt nervous parts of the body, are not to be told. How intolerable then are the pains of a wounded conſcience, a heart ſpiritually and throughly wounded, when every faculty of the ſoul is tortured, under a ſenſe of guilt, accompanied with a fearful apprehenſion of approaching vengeance! Yet this is not all: for,

3. IT further conveys this idea alſo, that their wound was deadly. It was not only deep and cruciating, but no leſs than mortal, and left to its natural courſe muſt have been fatal. This, however dreadful, is clearly laid up in the phraſe. It is well known, that an entrance into the natural heart, is at leaſt certain, and for the moſt part preſent death to the body. Hence the ſoldier who pierced the body of our Saviour, while it hung on the croſs, confirmed his deceaſe. For the natural body may ſeem to be dead, when, in reality, it is alive, the vital principle being only retired out of ſight; but it is impoſſible that a man ſhould ſurvive a wound that is truly and properly in his heart.

BUT our ſubject is ſpiritual. He that is pricked in the heart, as theſe men of Judea, dies immediately, i. e. a ſentence of condemnation and death enters his conſcience; and being ſelf-convicted, under a ſenſe of his

his guilt and pollution, all hopes of being juſtified in and from himſelf are vaniſhed away. Thus ſaith Paul, "When the commandment came ſin revived and I "died; and the commandment which was ordained "unto life, I found to be unto death," Rom. vii. 9. A human body, into the heart of which a dagger has been thruſt, is not more certainly dead, in a natural, than the man whoſe conſcience hath been pierced with a due conviction of ſin is in a ſpiritual ſenſe. Thus, dead in himſelf, he may be truly repreſented as having received a mortal wound, ſince the terrors of death are fallen upon him; and unleſs relieved, through faith in the blood of Chriſt, and by the remiſſion of his ſins, he would certainly die in deſpair and periſh for ever. In a word, convinced ſinners are not unlike the terrified Egyptians, when they haſtened the Iſraelites out of the land, ſaying, "We be all dead men," Exod. xii. 33. But bleſſed be the Lord, "he is nigh unto them who are of "a broken heart, and ſaveth ſuch as be of a contrite "ſpirit, he healeth and bindeth up all their wounds, "according to the riches of his grace," Pſalm xxxiv. 18. xlvii. 3. compared.

But what pierced the heart of theſe mourning tranſgreſſors? Their guilt, even the guilt of all their ſins in general, as appears from the apoſtle's reply: Firſt ſeized with a tormenting ſenſe of their horrid and aggravated evil in the murder of Chriſt, whom they now were convinced was exalted to glory; then followed a ſenſe of their vileneſs by nature, and their manifold tranſgreſſions, from the puniſhment of which

they ſaw no way of eſcape, ſince they had ſhed the blood of the only Saviour; their fears therefore ran high, and they were under a dreadful apprehenſion of the vengeance of heaven. This was their wretched condition; and thus they were ready to periſh. To which muſt be added, that this was in ſome degree the caſe of each individual: it was not ſympathetick but radical; that is, one did not cry out for another, but each for himſelf; they might be ſome more and ſome leſs diſtreſſed, but every one was cordially, deeply, painfully, and mortally wounded.

But how came they thus ſorely diſtreſſed? It was by the preaching of Peter: "When they heard this." The whole of the apoſtle's diſcourſe had a tendency to awaken them; and it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that they were much moved under his preaching; but our tranſlators, by ſupplying the particle *this*, ſeem to apprehend, that the cloſing addreſs was what moſt affected theſe men, and particularly when they heard that this ſame Jeſus, whom they had crucified, was advanced to the throne in the heavens. Yet I apprehend it is to be referred to the ſermon in general. But was the hearing intended that of the outward ear only? Certainly No; this indeed was included. They doubtleſs heard in a natural ſenſe. But if this was all, how comes it then that the audience in general, in like manner, were not affected? Peter, we have ſeen, lifted up his voice, and though the aſſembly was large, there is reaſon to conclude that every one heard him diſtinctly. If natural hearing had been ſufficient, not a ſoul of

the

the thouſands preſent would have remained inſenſible: but thoſe who cry out in the text, though many in number, are manifeſtly diſtinguiſhed from the reſt of the multitude, which proves it was not the caſe univerſally.

It was in this aſſembly, as in moſt congregations where the goſpel is publiſhed with ſucceſs; ſome hear the word, under the preaching of which others, who ſet with them, are convinced and converted; yet, alas, they themſelves feel no remorſe, but remain hardened, as if they had never ſinned, or ſtood in no need of a Saviour! Thus, when Paul preached at Rome, "ſome "believed the things that were ſpoken, and ſome be- "lieved them not," Acts xxviii. 24. Truly, bare hearing, however diſtinct and exact, or long continued, is altogether inſufficient to produce this effect. No preaching whatever is capable of poſſeſſing the hearer, who is left in his native blindneſs, with a due ſenſe of ſin, ſpiritual ſorrow, or earneſt concern to be ſaved. In vain are the weapons of our warfare employed againſt the power of ſin in an unregenerate man, unleſs the omnipotent arm of Jehovah is exerted, and the ſinner is changed; the ignorance, unbelief, pride and enmity of his carnal mind, renders it invulnerable, like Job's leviathan: Theſe ſcales, under which he is ſhut up, ſeals him cloſe; nothing ſhort of a divine power can penetrate his fleſh and quicken his ſoul; he is proof againſt any argument, how ſtrong and convincing ſoever: The compariſon is but too juſt, 'his 'heart is as firm as a ſtone, yea as hard as a piece of

'a nether mill-ſtone; darts are counted as ſtubble, and 'he laugheth at the ſhaking of the ſpear.'

But the Spirit of the Lord had wrought effectually in theſe Jeruſalem-ſinners, and prepared their minds for the reception of his word; he had taken away the heart of ſtone and given an heart of fleſh. Hence they heard with underſtanding, faith and attention, as in Lydia, whoſe heart the Lord opened, Acts xvi. 14. Convictions prevailed, and they felt what they heard; and being fully perſuaded, they were not diſobedient, but believing, aſſured themſelves that God had made Jeſus of Nazareth both Lord and Chriſt: yet their faith did not riſe to an appropriating view of the Saviour; from this they were prevented by a fearful apprehenſion, natural in their circumſtances, of being excluded from an intereſt in his undertaking and death, whoſe blood they had wickedly ſhed: A thought which throws light on the ſenſe of their queſtion, and leads to the method they took for relief. They did not as ſome, give up all hope, or reject the counſel of God againſt themſelves. Convictions, which leave the ſubject under the power of ſin and unbelief, either excite their natural averſion to the wiſdom of God, or iſſue in deſpair. Such is the fatal tendency of legal conviction on the diſobedient. Very different the ſpirit and conduct of theſe mourning ſinners. Under a deep ſenſe of their guilt and a full perſuaſion of the authority of Jeſus, they are indeed in the utmoſt conſternation and anguiſh of ſoul, and even ready to periſh, yet have ſome diſtant hope. They could not diſcern how they could be ſaved by him they had mur-

dered; nevertheleſs they apply to his miniſters in a manner that proves a deep humiliation of ſoul, and an earneſt deſire, if poſſible, to obtain the ſalvation of God; yea and ſome expectation, at leaſt a peradventure, that his ſervants could direct them. They heartily believed that Jeſus was the Chriſt; and their open and earneſt application to the apoſtles, who preached in his name, in the preſence of all who crouded the temple, was an acknowledgement of him as far as their condition could poſſibly admit. Hopeful penitents indeed! to Peter and to the reſt of the apoſtles, theſe awakened and wounded tranſgreſſors betake themſelves for advice in their dangerous ſtate; and to whom ſhould they go, but to them whoſe preaching had been a means of convincing them of the glory and authority of Jeſus, as the only Lord and true Meſſiah, though that very conviction, under their preſent circumſtances, ſubjected them to the moſt painful diſtreſs? It is wiſdom, in this ſenſe, to turn unto him that hath torn us for an healing, it being often the pleaſure of the Almighty to bind up with the ſame hand by which he hath ſmitten. Thus directed by the Spirit of wiſdom, theſe diſtreſſed ſinners apply to the apoſtles for relief, and that with the higheſt reſpect; "Men and bre-"thren." Unbelievers are prone to deſpiſe the miniſters of the goſpel, but they who ſtand in need of ſalvation greatly reverence and eſteem them. Thus the jailor fled to Paul and Silas, though his priſoners, ſaying, "Sirs, what muſt I do to be ſaved?" Acts xvi. 30. An enquiry for ſubſtance, the ſame with that which is made by theſe awakened Jews of Peter and thoſe that were with him; "What ſhall we do?"

This

This queſtion ſuppoſes a ſenſe of their guilt, and implies a confeſſion of the ſame, with a painful apprehenſion of impending wrath and deſtruction: It likewiſe intimates a perſuaſion of the apoſtle's authority and ſkill in the methods of ſalvation, and alſo ſome hope of their compaſſion and readineſs to direct them in this fearful dilemma: "What ſhall we do?" I am ſenſible that there is a proneneſs in man, under legal conviction, to ſeek after righteouſneſs by his own works, hence it is remarked by ſome, on this clauſe, that awakened ſinners are generally at firſt upon a covenant of works; but, with ſubmiſſion, I apprehend the purport of the queſtion, under the circumſtances of theſe convicts, convey quite another idea. The difference between the perſons in the text, and that of the jailor is obvious: His conſcience was awakened by an alarming providence, which filled him with guilty fears, and the terrors of wrath were upon him. He might indeed have ſome general notion that Paul and Silas were ſervants of God, and no doubt he thought they could inſtruct him; but there is reaſon to conclude, that he was an utter ſtranger to the ſcriptures, and to Chriſt as the Saviour of ſinners; hence the word of the goſpel was ſpoken to him and his houſe. But theſe men of Judea knew the prophets; and their conviction took place under the preaching of Peter, and aroſe from a perſuaſion that Jeſus whom they had ſlain was the Chriſt. The queſtion with them, was not who was the Saviour, nor how ſinners are to be ſaved by him? It ſeems chiefly, if not altogether to turn on this point, namely, whether there was any hope for them, ſeeing they had crucified him

who

who alone had power to ſave, q. d. 'O Men and 'Brethren, we are now perſuaded that Jeſus of Naza-'reth is truly the Meſſiah, what then ſhall we do? 'Our tranſgreſſions are innumerable, and our iniquity 'great! We are vile and ſinful beyond all expreſſion, 'and are verily guilty in ſhedding the blood of that 'holy One, whom God approved among us. Is there 'any hope for us in this ſame Jeſus God hath made 'both Lord and Chriſt? What ſhall we do? We 'that have crucified the only Saviour? How ſhall we 'eſcape his righteous vengeance? Is it poſſible for us 'to be ſaved by him we have murdered? Alas, for 'us, blood-guilty tranſgreſſors! O tell us, we beſeech 'you, Sirs, tell us what we ſhall do!' Thus they were ſorely perplexed but not in deſpair, though indeed very near it, for being convinced of ſin, of righteouſneſs, and of judgment to come, and of the authority of that Jeſus they ſlew, to ſave and to deſtroy, they could not ſee how it was poſſible they ſhould be ſaved: It was truly a very dark caſe, and extremely dangerous, inſomuch, that if any awakened ſelf-condemned ſinner had reaſon to deſpair, thoſe men moſt certainly had: but, adored be the riches of ſovereign mercy, repentance and remiſſion of ſins was preached in his name, and even began with ſucceſs at Jeruſalem. It appears in the following account, that many, who were more or leſs concerned in killing the Prince of life, were ſaved through faith in the blood they had ſhed. Aſtoniſhing grace! O the confuſion that will ſeize thoſe, who periſh under the report of the goſpel, when ſinners, who crucified the Son of God, ſhall appear to inherit life everlaſting! The fearful impenitent

impenitent will have no juſt ground of complaint, or be able to plead, in judgment to come, that there was not ſufficient encouragement for his hope of being ſaved on repentance. Theſe examples of rich and ſuperabounding grace will then redound to the honor of God, and the unbeliever ſhall be covered with ſhame. Art thou deſpairing, dear Reader, becauſe of thine aggravated guilt? think on the mercy theſe tranſgreſſors obtained, whoſe ſins were as ſcarlet and crimſon, but were waſhed in his blood whom they crucified. Look unto Jeſus and be ſaved; thou ſhalt not be confounded, but ſtand with his ſaints before him at his coming.

LECTURE XI.

An improvement on the caſe of thoſe who were convinced by the preaching of Peter, on the day of Pentecoſt.

HAVING taken a view of their ſorrowful caſe who were awakened under Peter's diſcourſe, and the method they purſued for relief, it may be uſeful to make ſome remarks on this firſt inſtance of ſucceſs by the goſpel publiſhed in the name of a riſen Saviour. Theſe, with proper reflections, will compoſe the enſuing lecture.

AND the firſt thing deſerving our notice is this, namely, that from the beginning ſinners have been convinced

convinced and awakened to a concern about ſalvation by Chriſt, under the hearing of the word.

THE ſovereignty of God may be diſplayed, in opening the heart, without the intervention of a preacher; nor is it becoming to ſuppoſe that the Lord hath limited himſelf in the diſpenſations of his grace; Other means are ſubordinate to this appointment of heaven for the converſion of men, ſometimes, as with the jailor, ſtriking providences have been ſubſervient to the purpoſe of God in the call of his choſen; alſo prayer, reading, and the ſpiritual diſcourſe of the ſaints; and above all, the holy, loving and fruitful lives of profeſſors, have conduced to the convincing of others: theſe, I ſay, are often the means of promoting the faith, inſomuch that many date their firſt awakenings from one or more of them; nevertheleſs, the principal ſtated, and ordinary method in which the Almighty turneth ſinners to himſelf, is the word preached, as in the inſtance before us. Peter expounded the prophecies, reaſoned out of the ſcriptures, and applied to the conſcience of his hearers with earneſt addreſs; by this means many were pricked in the heart, and moved to enquire, what they muſt do? the conſequence of which, as hereafter appears, was that, on due encouragement, they embraced the goſpel, obtained remiſſion, and were ſaved. In this way we are to attempt the converſion of men to the end of the world; "for it pleaſ-"eth God, by the fooliſhneſs of preaching, to ſave "them that believe." The preaching of the croſs may be eſteemed fooliſh by an ignorant and periſhing world, but to them that are ſaved it is the wiſdom and

power

power of God: Thus faith comes by hearing, Rom. x. 17. Hence, beautiful are the feet of them who publiſh the goſpel of peace! This being the caſe, we are not to wonder that Satan ſhould, by every means in his power, ſet at nought, or diſcourage the miniſtry of the word, which he ſometimes, when permitted, attempts, by perſecutions and fiery trials, to terrify and diſhearten men from the ſervice; but at other times, by ſeducing men into error, diſorder, and licentiouſneſs, under the prevalency of which, there may be much preaching, and at the ſame time but little preaching of Chriſt; while thoſe few, whoſe miniſtry and converſation anſwer to the word of the Lord, are under ſore diſcouragements, yea and the very office itſelf in a manner deſpiſed. Whether there are no appearances tending this way in the preſent time, is left to the conſiderate Reader; but this is certain, that the enemy will attempt to diſgrace and turn aſide men from that ſort of preaching, of which we have an example in Peter; the old ſerpent well knows, that reaſoning from the authority of God, unto the conſciences of men, or arguments from ſcripture, are proofs againſt him, and fatal to his intereſt, being an appointed and effectual means, through the energy of the Spirit, for pulling down his ſtrong holds, and reſcuing poor captive ſinners from his kingdom of darkneſs. And is goſpel-preaching the ordinary means of ſalvation? How melancholy their caſe, who, under any temptation, withdraw themſelves from, or neglect the hearing of the word! Such are in the utmoſt danger of ruin! Nothing is impoſſible with God; but

we

we have no promiſe or other ground of hope, that he will follow after that man who forſakes the means of grace. Art thou tempted, my Friend, to turn away thine ear from the ſound of the goſpel? Beware, thou haſt no reaſon to expect that the Lord will prevent thee; and if thou art left in thine impenitence and hardneſs, thou ſhalt die in thy ſins, and periſh for ever; but this God forbid!

ANOTHER thing deſerving our notice, is the pungency of guilt in the conſcience. We have ſeen how cruciating the pains endured by thoſe awakened tranſgreſſors. Thus every one truly convinced, is more or leſs pricked in the heart. Theſe wounds by conviction are deeper, and of longer continuance in ſome than in others; but no quickened ſinner is an utter ſtranger to the torment of guilt, and ſome are grievouſly wounded indeed: ſuch are ready to cry out, as in Job, chap. vi. 4. "The arrows of the Almighty are "within me: the poiſon thereof drinketh up my ſpi-"rit, the terrors of God do ſet themſelves in array againſt "me." It may be uſeful to remember, that convictions are ſometimes like ſharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper, piercing and burning the ſpirit, till it is in a manner conſumed with death. Thus David gives his experience, Pſalm xxxxii. 3, 4. "When I kept ſilence," i. e. from confeſſing my ſins, "my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day "long; for day and night thy hand was heavy upon "me," i. e. preſſing him ſore with the weight of his iniquities, which now went over him as an heavy burthen, too heavy for him. Pſalm xxxviii. 2, 4.

Thus

Thus the wrath of God was like fire in his conſcience, and as it were burnt him up, for he adds, "my moiſ-"ture is turned into the drought of ſummer." Heman is another inſtance of this, he who crieth out, "while "I ſuffer thy terrors I am diſtracted," and again, "thy fierce wrath goeth over me, and thy terrors have "cut me off," Pſalm lxxxviii. 15, 16. And how painful a caſe muſt that heinous backſlider be in? who with deep humiliation for his vileneſs, thus beſeeches the God of all grace: "Make me to hear joy and "gladneſs, that the bones which thou haſt broken "may rejoice," Pſalm li. 8. One broken bone, often gives the patient inexpreſſible pain: how exquiſite then muſt the ſorrows of that heart be, which is juſtly compared to many broken bones, or rather to a body the multitude of whoſe bones are broken to pieces, which ſeems the alluſion of the Pſalmiſt? Take heed, Sirs, of ſin, and abſtain from the appearance of evil; for you ſee what dreadful havock it makes in the ſoul, when the wrath of God is let into the conſcience. Theſe indeed are extraordinary inſtances, but he that is duly affected with the evil of ſin, muſt be ſenſible of the curſe of the law, in proportion to which the terrors of the Almighty are upon him, and the wound is grievous; many are ſoon healed by the application of goſpel-grace, but ſome continue long under an afflicting ſenſe of their deſert as ſinners, without any comfortable view of their intereſt in Jeſus the only Redeemer, which is truly deplorable; bleſſed be God their caſe is not deſperate, he that wounds alſo can heal, and a fountain is opened in

the

the goſpel to him who is ready to periſh: but the pains which ariſe from the ſting of death in the conſcience, are ſometimes ſcarce to be born; and he that lies under them, being as yet without an appropriating view of the Saviour, is an object of great compaſſion, for his ſorrows are not to be told.

We may further remark, that the moment a man's conſcience is ſmitten with guilt, he is anxious for relief. Slight impreſſions may be ſoon taken off, by the preſumptuous and carnal reaſonings of the fleſhly mind, and the diſturbed ſinner may be able by ſome means to ſtifle conviction within himſelf; but thoſe ſenſations of ſin, which are not effectual to make the ſubject cry out to God or man, or to both, ſcarce deſerve the name of convictions, at leaſt, they are very ſuperficial, and come ſhort of thoſe that ariſe from a full diſcovery of the law of death in the conſcience; under which a man muſt die in himſelf, be ſelf-condemned, and as it were flee from himſelf to another for relief. Hence awakened ſouls are enquiring ſouls. If thy convictions, dear Reader, have not obliged thee to cry for direction and help, thou art yet unacquainted with thy danger, and incapable of feeling the joy of ſalvation in Chriſt.

In one word, if the conduct of theſe Jeruſalem-ſinners was becoming or worthy the imitation of others under the like circumſtances, it is natural and proper for them that are pierced with conviction, to open their caſe unto others. Indeed, if I may be allowed the expreſſion, God is our only Father-confeſ-

ſor, and by his Spirit alone can the heavy-laden ſinner be led unto Chriſt, and find reſt for his ſoul. Nevertheleſs, the Lord operates by means and inſtruments, and many are held under terror, and expoſed to the temptations of ſatan for want of revealing their caſe. And there is ſuch a thing as ſuffering in conſequence of hiding our guilty fears from man, as well as from God. O afflicted Sinner, conceal not thy trouble! Art thou diſtreſſed about thy ſpiritual eſtate? Or doſt thou labour under fearful apprehenſions of wrath for thy ſins, and knoweſt not what thou ſhalt do to be ſaved? Come, follow this early example, an example which ſo well ſucceeded—apply to ſome chriſtian friend or miniſter of the goſpel—be not afraid or aſhamed to unboſom thyſelf to thoſe who fear God—and eſpecially ſeek direction of them by whom he hath awakened thee. This frequently proves a means of ſpeedy relief; an inſtance of which is before thee. To theſe obſervations it may be uſeful to add a reflection or two.

And firſt, Beloved, review the wonderful ſcene! How aſtoniſhing the grace and power of God! It was rich grace indeed that the goſpel ſhould be preached, and mercy lay hold on Jeruſalem-ſinners; that God ſhould extend his kindneſs to men who had preſumed thus wickedly to crucify the Son of his love! Yet ſuch was his abounding grace! And no leſs marvellous that power by which the hearts of ſo many obſtinate rebels were changed, and in an inſtant reduced from the utmoſt blindneſs and infidelity unto a ſenſe of their ſpiritual condition, a belief in the Meſſiah,

ſiah, and an unfeigned concern about their ſalvation from wrath to come. O the omnipotent arm of the Lord! When that is revealed, the report is believed; and when he worketh, who ſhall let it? Well ſaith the prophet, "Thy people ſhall be willing in the day of "thy power."

And what muſt be the torments of hell? If ſin in the conſcience is ſo painful, and the heart of a convinced tranſgreſſor is expoſed to ſuch horror and anguiſh under the apprehenſions of wrath, how miſerable muſt they be who are drinking this cup of the damned! Is a wounded conſcience ſo tormenting in this world, where the goſpel is preached, and a mind, pierced with conviction, liable to be ſo deeply affected, as to be juſtly the compared with an heart wounded by poiſoned daggers or ſcorpion-ſtings, how dreadful the avenging hand of the Almighty in a ſtate of judicial ſuffering! Far be it, Lord, that any peruſing theſe papers, ſhould hereafter be numbered with thoſe wretched ſpirits, who are too ſadly convinced by what they now feel of their eternal miſery, to flatter themſelves that they ſhall ever eſcape! Thus, in the parable of Lazarus, the rich man lifts up his deſpairing eyes, from the bottomleſs pit, without hope or deſire of being delivered from thence: He pleads for the warning of others, after being denied the leaſt drop of water to cool his own tongue, but not a word of his releaſe from this place of torment: No; alas, ſuch know that they are reſerved in everlaſting chains under darkneſs unto the judgment of the great day! Fearful ſtate, where hope never comes, where juſtice

reigns without mercy, and where no ſinner has a rational ground to enquire, "What muſt I do to be "ſaved?"

FROM this inſtance we may alſo infer the hideous cries of unbelievers when Chriſt the judge ſhall appear. If a perſuaſion that Jeſus is exalted and made Lord of all, occaſioned thoſe who crucified him to cry out as perſons undone, how will they wail and lament who finally reject him, when they ſee him revealed from heaven to take vengeance on thoſe who obey not the goſpel! "Behold, ſaith John, Rev. i. 7. he cometh "with clouds, and every eye ſhall ſee him, and they "alſo which pierced him; and all kindreds of the "earth ſhall wail becauſe of him." Then ſhall the finally impenitent, who have ſtifled their convictions, and deſpiſed or neglected the ſalvation of God, ſee and know that Jeſus is the judge who is able to deſtroy; they ſhall then cry to the mountains and rocks, ſaying, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of "him that ſitteth on the throne, and from the wrath "of the Lamb," alas but in vain! Now the hearts of unbelievers are ſtout, they refuſe to ſubmit; and many of them ſet their mouths againſt the dignity and grace of the glorious Redeemer; they deny the wonderful conſtitution of his perſon, blaſpheme his deity, trample under foot his blood of atonement, and would laugh his diſciples to ſcorn; but their tongues will then be otherwiſe employed, when they behold him coming to judgment; then will they, too late, be convinced, and cry out of their miſery and ruin, in the awful manner deſcribed by the prophet, "Who

"among

" among us ſhall dwell with the devouring fire? Who " amongſt us ſhall dwell with everlaſting burnings?" Iſa. xxxiii. 14. Alas! alas! who indeed! And what ſhall they do? The queſtion is vain: They are undone; nothing can be done to prevent their immediate and everlaſting deſtruction; the trumpet of the goſpel will not then ſound: No, but the trump of God as at Sinai, with thundering and lightenings, will ſummons the workers of iniquity to his awful tribunal; from whence being openly condemned, they ſhall be turned into hell, with that tremendous ſentence, " De- " part from me, ye curſed, into everlaſting fire prepared " for the devil and his angels. Then ſhall they call " upon him whom they have deſpiſed, but he will not " anſwer; they ſhall ſeek him early, but ſhall not find " him," Prov. i. 28. Thus, when trouble and anguiſh ſeize the diſobedient, they will cry and call, but alas the Judge, whom they have deſpiſed as a Saviour, " will laugh at their calamity and mock at their fear," ver. 26. If the Reader is ſlighting this Jeſus, let him beware leſt deſtruction come upon him as a whirlwind, there will ſurely be none to deliver.

But is any man afflicted and ready to periſh? How great is the mercy to have the word of ſalvation near to that ſoul! What muſt have become of theſe men had there been none to inſtruct them? But happy for them, that in their diſtreſs they knew where to flee, and had thoſe at hand whom the Lord had appointed to ſhew unto men the way of ſalvation. Their bones were broken, and their hearts grievouſly ſmitten, but a ſkilful phyſician is near to bind up and comfort. The

impenitent and careleſs make light of the goſpel, and account it no favor to dwell where the faithful ſervants of Jeſus abide; but the man who is anxious about being ſaved, will rejoice that the word of the Lord and his miniſters are nigh: this often proves a means of ſpeedy relief, as in the caſe of theſe Jews. However, ſince the pains of a wounded conſcience are exquiſite, and are not to be healed, but through faith in the blood of Chriſt, the advantage of being under a goſpel-miniſtry, when in ſpiritual diſtreſs, is obvious. Nothing is more precious to thoſe who enquire after life, than the word of the Lord, or more amiable in their eyes than the feet of thoſe who publiſh his name. Then prize your happy ſituation, who dwell in the midſt of the churches of Chriſt, and conſtantly ſit under the ſound of his goſpel, that you receive not this grace in vain. But again,

WERE ſo many converted through a divine bleſſing on the preaching of the apoſtles? Who can forbear though it be with reluctance, the melancholy reflection, I mean the affecting difference between the primitive times and thoſe in which we live? How inſenſible are the generality of hearers? What reaſon to be grieved at the prevailing hardneſs and unbelief of the multitude? Where are any now crying out, under a ſenſe of their guilt, what ſhall we do? Do not men for the moſt part, hear as if they had no need of a Saviour, or as if preaching was a form, and miniſters at beſt appointed to entertain with a ſong? Now, inſtead of many being pierced under one ſermon, as in Peter's aſſembly, are not many diſcourſes delivered, and, in appearance

appearance not a ſingle heart moved? 'Lord, where 'is thine arm? are thy bowels reſtrained? hear our 'groans, who labour in thy vineyard, and long after 'the ſalvation of thy choſen? It is thy work, O Lord of 'hoſts thou knoweſt them that are thy people; through 'thy power, make the goſpel effectual to ſave them? O 'let not thy faithful miniſters be aſhamed! Sharpen thine 'arrows in the hearts of thine enemies, that being 'pierced through the ſoul, they may look unto Jeſus and 'be healed!'

And now, my dear Reader, art thou altogether unacquainted with the evil of ſin and a conſcience ſmitten with guilt? haſt thou never ſaid, at leaſt in thine heart, what muſt I do? Permit me as one who ſeeks thy felicity: Whence is it that thou art ſecure and whole, while others are broken and wounded? Why ſo indifferent about ſalvation, when many, ready to periſh, are with anxiety and zeal crying out for direction how they ſhall eſcape? Haſt thou no cauſe of diſtreſs on account of thy ſin? Art thou exempted from the wrath of God, or not equally expoſed to his juſt indignation in common with other tranſgreſſors? And canſt thou be eaſy? O thy aſtoniſhing hardneſs! would to God that this heart of ſtone was removed! Soon, very ſoon will thy conſcience open and witneſs againſt thee; and how wilt thou endure the curſe of the law which thou haſt broken? It will make thee as a fiery oven when judgment takes place; unleſs found in Chriſt it will burn to the loweſt hell. Indeed, as obſerved, the caſe of the Jews was peculiar, and for the moſt part, the anguiſh of an awakened ſinner is in

proportion to his guilt. So that the diſtreſs of true penitents differ much in point of degree; nor is the evidence of a ſaving change to be meaſured by the pangs of the ſubject: It is poſſible, yea it ſeems evident from experience, that one who falls ſhort of the obedience of faith, may endure ſharper and longer convictions than, in ſome inſtances, attend the converſion of another. Nevertheleſs, every one will ſooner or later be ſtinged with the evil of ſin; and though the convinced are not alike grieved, the man who taſtes not the bitterneſs of death, is incapable of applying to the Saviour for life.

In a word, may the faithful, for Chriſt's ſake, and in love to precious ſouls, ſtrive in their prayers for the power of the Spirit: Under his divine agency the ſtout-hearted are reduced to obedience! O that this hand of the Lord, being with us, as in the primitive times, numbers believed and turned unto him! And if any man is pierced with a ſenſe of his abounding iniquity, let him know that with the Father is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption; for theſe men of Iſrael, who even crucified his Son, on a conviction of their folly and danger, cried not in vain, as the following lecture will ſhew.

LECTURE

LECTURE XII.

The nature of evangelical repentance. What it is to be baptized in the name of Jeſus for the remiſſion of ſins; and in what reſpect the Holy Ghoſt is given to them that believe.

WE are now come to the counſel of God by his inſpired miniſter unto the enquiring Jews, wherein the riches of his grace is opened for the relief of a ſenſible ſinner. The Lord reſpecteth not any man's perſon: It is therefore a ſtanding direction to every one, who, in like manner, is convinced of his evil and danger, and would eſcape the vengeance of heaven. This ſeaſonable reply is recited in Acts ii. 38. and runs in theſe words: "Then Peter ſaid unto them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the "name of Jeſus Chriſt, for the remiſſion of ſins, and "ye ſhall receive the gift of the Holy Ghoſt." A kind and ſalutary anſwer, in which we are to mark the apoſtle's direction, and the motive on which he would engage theſe mourning tranſgreſſors to obedience,

His direction is twofold; to repent, and to be baptized. The common notion of repentance is ſorrow for ſin: and there is reaſon to apprehend that ſome deceive

ceive themſelves by reſting in a ſuperficial tranſitory conviction; which, however grievous, falls ſhort of the genuine ſorrow of a contrite heart, which alone is acceptable to God. No doubt repentance includes a conviction, yea a painful conviction of ſin; and it muſt be allowed, that, conſcious of guilt, a man is aſhamed and afflicted. But, properly ſpeaking, repentance is a change, the ſubject of which, is not only filled with a ſenſe of his error, and grieved for his folly, but alſo is bent againſt the evil that hath enſlaved him, reſolved to flee from it and amend. So that according to the nature and degree of real repentance, a reformation enſues. The conſcience of ſome abandoned tranſgreſſors, or hypocrites, may be incapable of feeling, as the fleſh of a man when ſeared with a hot iron, 1 Tim. iv. 2. Yet few are totally ignorant of remorſe, ſinners for the moſt part have at times an afflicting ſenſe of their guilt; yea, and in ſome inſtances very ſharp convictions may pierce the heart, and produce ſtrong cries and tears, reſolutions and promiſes of amendment; at the ſame time, as it afterwards appears, the man is unacquainted with godly ſorrow, and repentance unto life.

EVANGELICAL repentance is the gift of God by Jeſus Chriſt: It flows from a principle of divine life in the ſoul of him that is born of the Spirit; of which the convinced ſinner alone is a capable ſubject. In the exerciſe of this grace a man beholds the evil of ſin, is affected with its turpitude, and abhors it; and, being deeply ſenſible of his own vileneſs, abaſeth himſelf before God with an open confeſſion, in proſpect of pardoning

pardoning mercy. This repentance admits of no allowed ſin, and is ever accompanied with a purſuit after holineſs, and a converſation becoming the goſpel. One infallible criterion of genuine repentance is faith, i. e. actively conſidered; for though repentance and faith may be diſtinguiſhed, they are radically the ſame, being the exerciſe of a renewed ſoul under the influence of divine grace, with a view to ſalvation. Faith, in its prime act, is truly expreſſed by an excellent writer *, to be the flight of a penitent ſinner to Chriſt for ſalvation. Certainly the repentance deſcribed, which is of a ſpiritual and ſaving nature, is not without faith, whereby the ſubject hath a diſcernment of ſpiritual things: And the firſt effect of being thus truly penitent, in the views of that free remiſſion preached in the name of Jeſus, is obedience to the goſpel. A ſincere penitent lays hold of the promiſe, and flees for refuge to Chriſt. Thus repentance, under the call of the goſpel, is compleated by the obedience of faith. The penitent man comes to Jeſus confeſſing his guilt and pollution; he heartily renounces all merit in himſelf, and believing the promiſe, reſts on the Redeemer as the only and omnipotent Saviour. So then, to repent, to be converted, and to believe in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, are ſynonymous phraſes, at leaſt the repentance Peter intends, and which is the ſubject of a goſpel-miniſtry, iſſues in nothing ſhort of truſt in Chriſt, or a turning to him as the ſtrong-hold and hope of them who are ready to periſh: And accordingly we find, Mark i. 15. the diſciples were ſent forth to preach, ſaying, "Repent ye and believe the goſ-
"pel."

* Owen on juſtification, page 99.

" pel." It is repentance from infidelity and rebellion againſt God, as he is revealed in his word, which is accompanied with faith and holy obedience, according to the uſe of the expreſſion in Luke xvi. 30. where the rich man is ſpeaking to Abraham concerning his ſurviving brethren, who like himſelf lived in infidelity and ſin, ſaying, " But if one went unto them from " the dead, they will repent;" i. e. of their unbelief, as appears from the ſcope of the place. In like manner evangelical repentance is nothing ſhort of believing and turning to the Lord.

THIS idea of repentance in the text is confirmed by the circumſtances of the objects addreſſed: they were deeply convinced of their guilt, and in the utmoſt diſtreſs. A true penitent indeed hath an habitual ſenſe of the evil and bitterneſs of ſin; it is exceeding ſinful in his eyes, and dreadful in its effects under the curſe of a broken law, and ſtill more heinous in the light of the goſpel; but where is the propriety of exhorting perſons to mourn over ſin, whoſe hearts were already overwhelmed under a ſenſe of their great iniquity, and with the fears of vengeance to come? Nor can repentance here ſignify a change of mind or opinion concerning Jeſus, and in conſequence an alteration in their conduct, ſo as no longer to oppoſe him as an impoſter, under which pretence they had taken away his life, ſince a conviction of his divine authority was a principal occaſion of their diſtreſs and confuſion; nor doth the apoſtle offer a word more in vindication of his character, or to prove him the Meſſiah. In ſhort, theſe men ſtood in no need of being called upon to be

ſorry

ſorry for ſin, or to be perſuaded that Jeſus was the Chriſt; they were deeply wounded under a ſenſe of their tranſgreſſions and fully convinced of his miſſion from heaven, but this they needed, namely, a perſonal application to, and reliance upon him as the Lord's Chriſt, without which no man's ſorrow for ſin, or opinion of Jeſus will ſave him; and for this theſe ſelf-condemned ſinners were prepared on due encouragement, as appears in the iſſue: but, at preſent being ignorant of the extent and riches of his grace, they ſeem fearful of being excluded the hope of the goſpel, and at their wits-end; and accordingly the apoſtle ſends them to Jeſus for pardon and life, with a joyful aſſurance of mercy, and he urges it upon them as needful to an eſcape from the wrath they deſerved. This ſenſe of repentance in the text correſponds not only with the circumſtances of the perſons addreſſed, but likewiſe with the motives uſed by the apoſtle, and the direction he gives them; for no repentance ſhort of faith in Chriſt, ſtands connected with remiſſion of ſins, or entitles the ſubject to baptiſm; and, though there is reaſon to apprehend that, in the primitive times, ſome were partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, in his extraordinary gifts, who nevertheleſs were deſtitute of ſaving faith, yet a profeſſion of this faith was requiſite to a viſible claim in the promiſe, "Theſe ſigns ſhall follow them that believe," Mark xvi. 17. Nor did John, the forerunner of our Lord, in the courſe of his miniſtry, admit any to baptiſm for the remiſſion of ſins, without a confeſſion of their belief in him that ſhould come after him, whom he declared would baptize his diſciples with the Holy Ghoſt,

Matt.

Matt. iii. 11. compared with Acts xix. 4. And that a divine faith or holy truſt in Chriſt is contained in that repentance unto which the apoſtles exhorted their hearers, is evident from other paſſages of ſcripture. Thus, Peter ſays, "Repent ye therefore and be con-"verted, that your ſins may be blotted out." Acts iii. 9. And again, chap. viii. 37. When the eunuch propoſed himſelf to Philip for baptiſm, he replies, "If "thou believeſt with all thine heart, thou mayeſt." And further, chap. xvi. 30, 31. on the jailor's application to Paul and Silas under the like diſtreſs, ſaying, "What ſhall I do to be ſaved?" their anſwer is the ſame, "Believe on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt." Upon the whole, it appears that nothing leſs than a cordial faith is required in baptiſm with hope of remiſſion, and that therefore this faith is included in that repentance the apoſtle intends; in the exerciſe of which the Jews are directed to be baptized in the name of Jeſus.

I HAVE been thus particular in ſettling what I apprehend the juſt idea of the expreſſion *repent*, as it throws a light on many exhortations in the New-Teſtament, and is more eſpecially needful to a right underſtanding and improvement of the paſſage before us. Peter is plainly directing theſe awakened tranſgreſſors, who were anxious to know what they ſhould do, notwithſtanding their aggravated guilt, to believe on Jeſus and ſubmit themſelves to him, and publicly own their dependance upon him as Lord and Chriſt. To repent, therefore, muſt carry in it faith in the Redeemer; and this exhortation ſeparate from the encouragements expreſsly ſubjoined, was adapted to relieve theſe diſtreſſed

treſſed ſouls from the tormenting fears of being abſolutely excluded from the grace of God in his Son; and is a noble inſtance of the ſkill and faithfulneſs of the preacher, and alſo ſhews that the miniſters of Chriſt are warranted to encourage every ſenſible ſinner.

Nor is it ſuppoſed in this exhortation, thus underſtood, that theſe Jews, or any other under the like circumſtances, are able in and of themſelves to believe in Jeſus; this direction and encouragement is given to them only who are called, ver. 39. "to as many as "the Lord our God ſhall call." By this the apoſtle ſufficiently guards againſt any undue aſcription of power in the creature, and leads our thoughts to the energy of the Spirit, in quickening grace, as needful unto ſaving repentance or faith. An heart or ability ſo to repent is undoubtedly the free gift of God, diſpenſed from the King of grace, wrought in the ſubject by the power of the Holy Ghoſt, under whoſe divine agency alone this and every other ſpiritual act is exerted; all which is clearly ſhewn in different parts of the ſacred writings; thus it is declared, "God hath exalted Jeſus "to give repentance and remiſſion of ſins," Acts v. 31. And again, "Then hath God alſo granted to the "Gentiles repentance unto life," chap. xi. 18. "And "we know that it is God which worketh, in his "called ones, both to will and to do of his good plea-"ſure," Phil. ii. 13. Hence they repent and believe: It is therefore no other than cavil, in oppoſition to the expreſs counſel of God, to argue from ſuch-like exhortations to the power of man without ſpecial grace to repent and turn unto the Lord. Moſt certainly

"no

" no man can come to Chriſt, except the Father " which ſent him draw him," John vi. 44. Yet awakened ſinners are to be directed and exhorted to repent, and to ſubmit themſelves to Jeſus for the remiſſion of ſins; and the moral ends of ſuch exhortations are obvious to any unprejudiced perſon; they are to convince men of the neceſſity there is for repentance unto life, and a means, in the hand of the Spirit, to lead, encourage, and animate periſhing ſinners to believe and be ſaved. And this anſwer may ſuffice to ſhew the perverſeneſs of them who will repreſent this method, in a goſpel-miniſtry, as inconſiſtent with the impotency of man, or the goodneſs of God, ſince it is evident that theſe exhortations are adapted to excite convinced tranſgreſſors to repentance and faith, and the Almighty is pleaſed to render them effectual thereunto in the hearts of his choſen: therefore no man need ſcruple to follow the example before us, in the courſe of his miniſtry, when ſinners enquire, what ſhall we do? But freely and earneſtly recommend them, even every one, to repent and believe on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt; nor ſhould any be offended at this, ſince it is manifeſtly rational, all things conſidered, and a means owned of God for the ſalvation of men.

To repentance the apoſtle enjoins ſubmiſſion to baptiſm; " And, ſays he, be baptized every one " of you in the name of Jeſus Chriſt for the re- " miſſion of ſins." I ſhall not enlarge on the form of this divine inſtitution, which I am ſorry to ſay, like ſome other appointments of the Redeemer, is more known than practiſed; but the deſign I am upon

upon, and the exhortation of Peter, will not permit me to be totally ſilent on an article eſſential to primitive worſhip. Nothing is more my averſion than the ſcorn and anger, which is but too often ſeen in debating this point. It may be pleaſing to the fleſh, but this is not by manifeſtation of the truth, commending ourſelves to every man's conſcience in the ſight of God; it is unſeemly and vain. I would therefore in meekneſs and ſobriety, with a cordial eſteem for thoſe brethren who are otherwiſe minded, uſe a becoming freedom on the ſubject, on which it may be difficult to offer any thing which has not for ſubſtance been urged, or at leaſt hinted already by others.

It is notorious that a change in the mode of this goſpel-ordinance, from dipping to ſprinkling, hath obtained; and in theſe and ſome other parts of the world, called chriſtian, become almoſt general; nevertheleſs they are plainly quite different, and cannot be made one and the ſame, or ſpoken of as ſuch withuut a violation of language and ſenſe. Sprinkling was a rite of purification under the law, but manifeſtly and ever diſtinct from that of bathing or immerſion, which was alſo appointed, Numb. xix. 13, 19. compared. To confound theſe different modes, or to uſe the one inſtead of the other, ſeems highly unreaſonable, and not to be juſtified; and indeed, with becoming reſpect to thoſe who can uſe this liberty, I take leave to ſay, that, in my opinion, to call *ſprinkling baptiſm*, is truly no better. To baptize, is to waſh the ſubject by *bathing* or *dipping*, and not to wet a part only by *aſperſion* or *ſprinkling*. Nor let the reader think that our practice of *dipping* is confined to a few, becauſe it

is by many neglected or deſpiſed in this iſland, and ſome other countries; not to inſiſt on the thouſands who conſcientiouſly adhere to this mode in our own native country, and eſpecially in our American colonies. Dr. Wall, a zealous and learned writer in favor of infant-baptiſm, obſerves, Part II. page 309. 1ſt edit. 'All 'chriſtians in the world, who never owned the pope's 'uſurped power, do and ever did *dip* their infants in the 'ordinary uſe.' And he adds, 'If we take the diviſion 'of the world from the three main parts of it, all the 'chriſtians in Aſia, all in Africa, and about one third 'part of Europe, underſtand by baptiſm *immerſion*, and 'ſo practice.' Every attempt to deſtroy or remove this native and genuine idea of baptiſm is vain; and I may venture to ſay, that it will never be in the power of man to ſhew that baptizing is not dipping, or that this was not the mode in which the apoſtles and firſt miniſters performed this chriſtian ordinance. Baptiſm is ſtiled the counſel of God; a religious rite ſet up with divine authority, firſt by John the forerunner of our Lord, whoſe miſſion from heaven was clear. Hence when Chriſt put the queſtion to the elders concerning his baptiſm, they feared to ſay it was of men. The Jews were ſtartled when they ſaw him baptize and demand his authority, "Why baptizeſt thou, if thou be not "Chriſt nor Elias?" John i. 15. From whence I am convinced, the notion ſome propagate concerning the Jewiſh cuſtom to baptize proſelytes is without any foundation. And it ſeems unworthy our divine Law-giver, to ſuppoſe that a main inſtitution of his kingdom is borrowed from a ſuperſtitious cuſtom of the Jews, which muſt be the caſe if it really was in practice, ſeeing it is

plain

plain that Moſes never enjoined it, but it ſeemed a new thing to the Jews. However, that this harbinger of the Meſſiah baptized by immerſion is evident by the name he acquired from his practice, viz. John the Baptiſt or Dipper. Baptizing and dipping is ſo clearly the ſame, that it would have been impertinent, eſpecially in a country where it was daily in uſe, to have attempted a deſcription of the manner in which it w s performed; and had no prejudice taken place in favor of a contrary practice, the circumſtances related of our Lord's baptiſm would ſuffice to ſatisfy every ſerious enquirer. We are told, that "when he was baptized he went up "ſtraightway out of the water." Dr. Whitby, and other eminent authors, who plead for the baptizing of infants, notice the juſt obſervation of the Greek church on the paſſage, which is this, namely, 'that he, who 'aſcended out of the water, muſt firſt deſcend down 'into it.' And it is remarkable that the inſpired apoſtle uſes the ſame argument in reference to the aſcenſion of Chriſt, which preſuppoſes his reſurrection from the dead, ſhadowed forth in baptiſm by immerſion, Eph. iv. 9. "Now that he," i. e. Chriſt, "aſcended, what "is it but that he alſo deſcended firſt into the lower "parts of the earth?" i. e. died and was buried; and the inference is too natural not to be diſcerned by the plaineſt capacity: But, adds the Doctor, 'Baptiſm, 'therefore, is not to be performed by ſprinkling, but 'by waſhing the body;' and ſtill further, ſays he, 'Indeed it can only be ignorance of the Jewiſh rites in 'baptiſm, that this is queſtioned.' His teſtimony I hope will not be altogether diſregarded.

On a ſuppoſition that the apoſtles, who wrote the New-Teſtament, uſed the terms of the ſeptuagint, which is generally allowed, and ſeems clearly the caſe, it is ſubmitted to the learned of the pædobaptiſts themſelves, '* Whether it was poſſible for them to fix on two 'words in all that Greek tranſlation that can more 'preciſely determine this particular manner of waſh-'ing the body by immerſion diſtinct from all other pu-'rifications, than thoſe they have actually choſen, viz. 'Βαπτιζω †, and λυω;' and the ſame mode of baptiſm is confirmed by every inſtance, and particularly the place choſen for the adminiſtration of this divine ordinance; nor doth any other manner of waſhing agree with the manifeſt reference we have therein unto the burial and reſurrection of our Saviour, and to that of the ſubjects being raiſed from the death of ſin to walk in newneſs of life, ſo clearly pointed out in Rom. vi. and

* Letters to a Right Rev. Author, &c. Part I. Letter IV. page 29.

† Dr. Gale hath abundantly ſhewn from the critics and alſo from the Grecian poets and hiſtorians, that Βαπτιζω always ſignifies to dip, which every one who is capable may conſult with advantage; beſides, as that learned writer juſt y obſerves, if the expreſſion was otherwiſe ever ſo ambiguous, yet, as it relates to baptiſm, the doctrine a d practice of John and the apoſtles ſufficiently determine the ſenſe unto dipping. Gale on baptiſm, Letters III, IV and V. And from the ſame letters it appears that Mr. Wall himſelf, who is the hiſtorian they refer to, intimates that the clergy would gladly revive the ancient practice, and deſired, according to the direction of the rubric, to baptize by dipping all that are willing to receive it in that manner, and are able to bear it; and I preſume, that notwithſtanding the continuance of ſprinkling in the national church, with ſcarce any exception for half a century more, muſt rather have increaſed the popular prejudice in favor of the practice, there are ſtill not a few of that communion who are ſufficiently convinced to wiſh a return to the good old way.

and Col. ii. This alſo correſponds with every alluſion in ſcripture to baptiſm, and the general conceſſion or teſtimony of the moſt reputable advocates for baptizing of infants, ſince the practice exiſted, which is in favor of dipping. Among theſe, which are a multitude, the known wiſh of the above learned author, in his note on Rom. vi. 4. is much to the purpoſe, 'Immerſion, 'ſays he, was religiouſly obſerved by all chriſtians for 'thirteen centuries.' And he laments the change of it into ſprinkling without any allowance from the author of this inſtitution, or any licence from any council of the church; of which the reader will ſee more at large in conſulting his paraphraſe. And truly the cuſtom of aſperſion, however prevailing at preſent, is comparatively modern in England, and is even now only permitted by the governors of the national church, as appears in their liturgy. Some ſpeak of the ſuppoſed danger of dipping in theſe cold climates, and think this may be a very good reaſon for changing the form of baptiſm to ſprinkling, but experience proves the ſafety of dipping, and this mode is ſtill uſed in countries many degrees colder than ours; witneſs the Ruſſias, and even Muſcovia itſelf, in ſome parts of which it is extremely ſevere; nor hath it in any inſtance appeared injurious to dip the body, even of infants the moſt tender, in water. But admitting there ſeems a danger in dipping a weakly conſtitution, or in a very cold ſeaſon, ſhall we not truſt the Lord in the way of our duty? Shall we reaſon from thence in oppoſition to the wiſdom of God, unto a neglect of his ſovereign and gracious appointment? Or will this juſtify a change in the mode of a divine ordinance? It is a truth that hath been

frequently urged, that 'on a mere poſitive inſtitution 'we cannot argue as in matters of natural or moral 'duty.' It therefore becomes us to obey with humility and reverence, and conſcientiouſly adhere in our practice to every circumſtance preſcribed in the word. This method of reaſoning therefore is not to be defended, nor ſhould any preſume to act thereupon contrary to the expreſs will of the Lord whom we ſerve. Upon the whole, it is truly aſtoniſhing, and an affecting inſtance of human weakneſs, that in a country where the cuſtom univerſally prevailed ſo many centuries, and where the practiſe ſtill ſtands expreſly directed in the public inſtrument of the national church, that this form of baptiſm ſhould be counted ſtrange, novel or indecent. Is it not ſtrange, that, under theſe circumſtances, a people who cannot but perform this appointment of the Saviour by dipping, ſhould, for that reaſon only, be derided or cenſured? Alas, how fickle mankind! To what amazing prejudices are we expoſed! That the general and ordinary way was to baptize by immerſion or dipping the ſubject 'into the water, is ſo plain and 'clear, ſaith Dr. Wall*, by an infinite number of 'paſſages, that one cannot but pity the weak endea-'vours of ſuch pædobaptiſts who would maintain the 'negative.' And I am perſuaded that moſt, who do not think it abſolutely neceſſary to the eſſence of baptiſm, and therefore remain in the popular way, will, on ſerious reflection, with that learned writer, diſown and ſhew a diſlike of the profane ſcoffs which ſome people give to the Engliſh antipædobaptiſts merely for their uſe of dipping; and certain I am, that if any are otherwiſe minded,

* Vol. II, 3d edit. p. 351.

minded, their zeal againſt this ancient mode of baptizing is not duly tempered with knowledge and charity.

Now this baptiſm is to be performed in the name of Jeſus Chriſt. The commiſſion of our Lord to his diſciples is plain and expreſs, Matt. xxviii. 19. "Go ye, "therefore, teach all nations, baptizing them in the "name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the "Holy Ghoſt." Nor are theſe words of Peter, "in "the name of Jeſus," to be otherwiſe taken than conſiſts with this order of the Saviour. No doubt this form is ſacred in the ordinance of baptiſm; for ſo, as hinted already, is every article preſcribed in a poſitive inſtitution, which entirely depends on the ſovereign will of the law-giver. It has been ſuggeſted, that the Jews, being already believers in the Father and the Holy Ghoſt, had need only of being baptized in the name of Jeſus; but there is not the leaſt intimation in ſcripture of this difference in the baptizing of Jews from that of the Gentiles, nor is the name of either divine Perſon to be omitted in the adminiſtration of this ordinance, ſeeing that would come ſhort of the expreſs direction of our Lord. Nevertheleſs chriſtian baptiſm may well be deſcribed in the name of Jeſus, as here and elſewhere, chap. viii. 16. x. 48. xix. 5. Since the authority of Jeſus is the ground of proceeding, and the ſubject not only confeſſes his faith in, and adores Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, the Three that bear record in heaven, but likewiſe in an eſpecial manner confeſſeth Chriſt as his king, and ſubmits to him as the Son of God and Lord of all. Baptiſm is an act of

ſolemn worſhip and perſonal devotion to the Redeemer, in which the parties own his authority, and ſurrender unto the Lord as his God. Hence it is ſtiled "calling "on the name of the Lord," Acts xxii. 16. A phraſe which indeed includes prayer after the example of Jeſus himſelf, of whom we read, Luke iii. 21. "that being "baptized and praying, the heaven was opened." But it likewiſe extends to the whole obedience of faith, Rom. x. 13, 14. where the apoſtle refers to the ſame propheſy quoted in Peter's diſcourſe, ver. 21. "And "whoſoever ſhall call upon the name of the Lord, ſhall "be ſaved." He that ſubmits to this ordinance with underſtanding, is baptized in the name of Jeſus, calling upon his name in the prayer of faith, and actually owns and ſubmits to the authority of Chriſt, who will ſave him.

It is added, "for the remiſſion of ſins;" which ſhews what troubled the heart of theſe awakened tranſgreſſors; it was guilt, their ſins were ſet in order before them, a ſenſe of which pierced them. But will water-baptiſm cleanſe us from ſin? No, no more than the tears of the penitent. Nothing is the meritorious cauſe of pardon but the atonement of the Saviour: His blood alone, applied to the wounded conſcience, can heal it. Thus Peter declares, "Through his name, whoſoever "believeth in him, ſhall receive remiſſion of ſins," Acts x. 43. And again it is written, "Whom God "hath ſet forth a propitiation, through faith in his "blood, to declare his righteouſneſs in the remiſſion of "ſins," Rom. iii. 25. And further, "In whom we "have redemption through his blood, the forgiveneſs

"of

" of ſins, according to the riches of his grace," Eph. i. 7. Thus the ſcriptures abundantly ſhew, that not baptiſm but the blood of Jeſus, in whoſe name we are baptized, is that which cleanſeth from ſin. This manner of ſpeaking, " be baptized for the remiſſion of " ſins," is by way of encouragement and direction to theſe afflicted enquiring ſouls, and ſhews that there was remiſſion even for them, and that they ſhould ſubmit to baptiſm in the exerciſe of faith on Chriſt, who, by the ſacrifice of himſelf, obtained eternal redemption, and whoſe ſufferings, death and reſurrection, are ſhadowed forth in the appointed form of this goſpel-inſtitution. In a word, the exhortation is univerſal and without any exception, " every one of you;" to ſhew that not one perſon, among the thouſands who were pricked in the heart, and who ſtood in need of pardon, was excluded from the hope of God's mercy in Chriſt; and that likewiſe not a ſingle believer, who laid hold of this mercy, was excluded from a profeſſed ſubjection to the goſpel, or public acknowledgment of his divine authority, and devotion to his will in the ſight of mankind.

To this obedience of faith the apoſtle annexeth a promiſe, " And ye ſhall receive the gift of the Holy " Ghoſt;" not in his quickening or regenerating influences, whereby the ſubject is truly convinced of ſin, and engaged to believe on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. A participation of his grace, in this reſpect, is previouſly required to baptiſm. Thus, as before, Philip ſaith to the eunuch, " If thou believeſt with all thine heart, " thou mayeſt." This promiſe may be underſtood in a ſenſe

a ſenſe peculiar to the primitive times, or accommodated to the hope of every baptized believer in all ages and places to the end of the world. It may refer to the extraordinary gifts which the Holy Ghoſt diſtributed among the apoſtles, who had alſo, by him, a power of conveying the ſame to others, by which the goſpel was then confirmed among the diſciples; many of whom were enabled to ſpeak with tongues, and to perform great things in teſtimony of the reſurrection of Jeſus, and for the edification of his church, Acts xix. Many, I ſay, for we are not to ſuppoſe that every one who was baptized was thus miraculouſly endowed, but only ſome, as circumſtances required. Thus Cornelius and others received the Holy Ghoſt at Ceſarea, Acts x. 47. In this view it is an aſſurance of their being confirmed by further inſtances of his wonderful operations which came to paſs, when, as we are told, "Many wonders "and ſigns were done by the apoſtles," Acts i. 43. and likewiſe that many of themſelves ſhould partake of his extraordinary gifts for the ſpread of the goſpel. Hence we read, chap. viii. 4. that a perſecution being raiſed at Jeruſalem, by which the diſciples in general were diſperſed, "they that were ſcattered abroad went "every where preaching the word." So that the wiſe was taken in his own craftineſs, and the malice of ſatan overruled to the increaſe of the kingdom of God, which that enemy ſought to deſtroy. Nevertheleſs, if believers now have any intereſt in this promiſe, it is not to be confined to theſe extraordinary gifts. The promiſe is given to every one: And I cannot help thinking that Peter includes, if not chiefly intends, thoſe operations of the Holy Ghoſt, whereby the faithful

ful are more abundantly enlightened, ſanctified and confirmed, even that working of the Holy Spirit, by which the chriſtian is ſealed to the day of redemption, and made meet for communion with God and his glorious inheritance, compare 2 Cor. v. 5. Eph. i. 13, 18. and chap. iv. 30. Certain it is that the Comforter, as a Spirit of adoption and a witneſſing Spirit, is more or leſs given to them that obey the goſpel, and that, in waiting on the Lord in his appointments, believers may expect to be eſtabliſhed with grace, and to increaſe in the knowledge of him unto a meetneſs for glory.

THUS Peter excites theſe awakened tranſgreſſors to evangelical repentance, which includes faith in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and to witneſs the ſame by being openly baptized in his name, in a certain proſpect of full remiſſion of ſins; yea though they had wickedly ſlain the Redeemer, he aſſures them notwithſtanding, that on confeſſion they ſhould be ſealed with the Holy Spirit of promiſe. Joyful tidings, which, through a divine energy, became life from the dead, and healed the wounds that had otherwiſe proved mortal. When they heard this, they gladly received the word, and delayed not to yield themſelves to the Lord. In like manner the goſpel is ſent to bind up every broken heart, and to comfort every ſinner who mourns. And therefore, dear Reader, if thine heart is wounded receive the conſolation, for a reconciled God is no reſpecter of perſons.

LECTURE XIII.

The promiſe on which Peter raiſes the expectation of the awakened Jews, upon their obeying the goſpel, briefly and fairly examined. With notes and reflections on the whole of their reply to their anxious queſtion.

THE apoſtle having encouraged the men of Judea, ſinful as they were, with a certain proſpect of remiſſion on repentance, and having aſſerted that, on being baptized in the name of Jeſus, they ſhould receive the Holy Ghoſt, proceeds to the ground of this bleſſed aſſurance. And his argument is this: "For "the promiſe is unto you and to your children, and "to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord "our God ſhall call." The promiſe is remiſſion of ſins, and the gift of the Holy Ghoſt unto them who repent and are baptized in the name of the Lord; and the paſſage would be eaſily underſtood, had there been no diſpute among chriſtians concerning the ſubject of baptiſm. But ſince ſome who plead for the baptizing of infants, have preſſed this text into their ſervice, it is needful to clear up the ſenſe, and to conſider whether it affords any foundation for that practice, which I ſhall attempt with candor in a very few words. In general, the promiſe is limited to them that are called. The word rendered children is not frequently, if at all, uſed for infants; and a right to baptiſm, as hinted already, is not the thing promiſed.

ONE

One might have thought that the laſt clauſe in this verſe would have effectually ſecured it from being applied in favor of infant-baptiſm, ſince while it extends its comfort to all that are called, it limits the objects of the promiſe to them. Now this call muſt be either the external call in the miniſtry of the word, or that which is internal and efficacious unto repentance and faith. If we underſtand of it the former, what infants are capable of that? Can babes and ſucklings, in a natural ſenſe, hear and underſtand the word of the goſpel? Or are the miniſters of Chriſt ſent to preach unto them? No ſober advocate for their being baptized will anſwer in the affirmative. An unprejudiced Reader will therefore eaſily admit, that the call here intended is that which is effectual unto repentance, a teſtimony of which is given in baptiſm. This call is of God by Jeſus, and wrought through the power of the Holy Ghoſt in the hearts of the regenerate, and conſequently peculiar to them who are born of the Spirit. Far be it to inſinuate, that infants are incapable of the ſanctifying operations of the Spirit, but how or when the almighty King of grace worketh in any ſuch, according to the counſel of his will, is a ſecret to us; but we are ſpeaking of what is revealed, and the rule of our duty in the adminiſtration of a divine ordinance, and we may, and muſt with freedom aſſert, that infants neither are nor can be the viſible ſubjects of this divine work, but the promiſe, whether of the Holy Ghoſt, or the remiſſion of ſins, or of ſalvation, verſe 21. which ſeems rather intended, is certainly limited to thoſe who are called of God, and to their children as ſuch; and

accordingly

accordingly the learned Dr. Whitby himſelf, whoſe regard for infant-baptiſm is not to be queſtioned, expreſly and juſtly declares, that theſe words will not prove a right of infants to this goſpel-inſtitution. See his annotations on the place.

But that none ſhould be miſled, or carried away by the ſound of the word *children* in this paſſage, it may be proper to note, that it is not παιδια, whereby young children or infants, when diſtinguiſhed from men and women, are expreſſed; for inſtance, that which is uſed in deſcribing thoſe who were miraculouſly fed, Matt. xiv. 31. and chap. xv. 38. from which the term pædobaptiſt is derived; but the word is τεκνοι, quite another word, and which ſignifieth poſterity rather than little children or infants. This is ſo obvious, that Dr. Hammond *, another zealous advocate for infant-baptiſm, hath theſe remarkable words on the place: 'If any hath made uſe of that very uncludent 'argument (ſo he ſtiles it) "the promiſe is made to 'you and your children," I have nothing to ſay in 'defence of them; I think the word children there is 'really the poſterity of the Jews.' So then, in the opinion of this learned pædobaptiſt, no good argument can be drawn from this paſſage to the right of the infant-ſeed of believers unto chriſtian baptiſm; and indeed it is ſtrange that wiſe and good men ſhould inſinuate the notion, much more that they ſhould, in any degree reſt the validity of infant-baptiſm on an expreſſion that is well known to have no reſpect to the infantile ſtate. Beſides, the promiſe as hinted, has no relation

* Reſol. 6, 24. Edit. 12mo, p. 256.

relation to baptiſm. Peter exhorts believers to be baptized, as incumbent on as many as the Lord ſhall call, upon which they are entitled to claim the promiſe, and encouraged to look for its accompliſhment in their own experience, to their ſatisfaction and joy; of which, by the way, infants are incapable; nor can the baptizing of infants be inferred with any colour of reaſon from this declaration of the apoſtle.

THE propriety of Peter's expreſſing himſelf in this manner will appear, if we conſider that the Jews were "the children of the prophets, and of the covenant "God made with their fathers, ſaying to Abraham, "And in thy ſeed ſhall all the kindreds of the earth be "bleſſed," Acts iii. 25. To them belonged the promiſes, Rom. ix. 4. It was their peculiar honor and advantage to have the promiſe of the Meſſiah, and of the bleſſings of life and grace, which come on the called through faith in his blood. Hence the goſpel was firſt preached to them: "Unto you firſt, God having raiſed up his "Son Jeſus, ſent him to bleſs you, in turning away "every one of you from his iniquities," Acts iii. 26. And in chap. xiii. 47. we read it was neceſſary that the word of God ſhould firſt be ſpoken to them. Indeed the promiſes aſcertained the pardon of no one while in a ſtate of unbelief; nor was an Iſraelite, who firſt enjoyed the means of grace, better entitled to claim remiſſion on repentance than the Gentiles who were originally void of the privilege; but it is eaſy to ſee the propriety and force of the apoſtle's argument with theſe awakened Jews, who were now convinced that

ſalvation

ſalvation was in no other than in that ſame Jeſus whom they had crucified. The promiſe being unto them and to their children *, even to as many as the Lord their God ſhall call, muſt needs encourage their hope as partakers of this calling, notwithſtanding their aggravated guilt, ſince it ſhewed there was mercy even for them, nor could they deſpair under ſuch a perſuaſion. How ſeaſonable and juſt was this reaſoning of the apoſtle with the people who had not only murdered the Prince of life, but had likewiſe imprecated his blood on themſelves and on their children, and thereby, as far as in their power, bound their blood-guiltineſs on their lateſt poſterity! O the tormenting diſtreſs that muſt attend a conviction of having deſtroyed both themſelves and their children. Dreadful will be the caſe of parents who ſhall hereafter, as ſome through a neglect of their ſouls or their ill example, be found acceſſary to the damnation of their offspring. Theſe Jeruſalem-ſinners were verily guilty in binding their poſterity under a curſe for their own wickedneſs, and no doubt it lay with weight on their conſcience, and they were terrified with the apprehenſion of having excluded themſelves from the mercy of God by ſlaying his Son, and alſo by expoſing their ſeed to his wrath. No, as if Peter ſhould ſay, though you have been thus guilty, guilty of the blood of the Lord, and guilty in curſing your poſterity, and deſerve everlaſting deſtruction, yet God, who foreſaw all your wickedneſs and knows the extent of his own grace, hath directed his promiſe to you; he has promiſed remiſſion of ſins on repentance to you and to your children, even to as many as he ſhall effectually call,

* Matt. xxvii. 25. τα τέκνα, the ſame expreſſion uſed in the promiſe.

call, being convinced of your evil, fear not to flee unto this ſame Jeſus, whom you have crucified; neither ye, nor your children, not one of you are excluded from the report of ſalvation in the Redeemer. Therefore, O ye men of Judea, truſt in the Lord and be ſaved! "Repent and be baptized every one of you, for the "remiſſion of ſins, &c." Thus Peter, ſkilful in the word of righteouſneſs, heals and animates the afflicted Jews, who lay bleeding under a ſenſe of their guilt and ready to periſh, with an aſſurance of obtaining mercy, according to the promiſe made to them, and to their poſterity, agreeable to the goſpel-report, which declares that "whoſoever ſhall call on the name of "the Lord, ſhall be ſaved." And the following things are manifeſt from the whole of this reply to theſe enquiring ſinners.

I. THAT a perſonal and cordial repentance is of infinite moment. Repent every one of you. No man ſhall receive remiſſion of ſins, or be ſaved from wrath to come, without that repentance unto life which leads the ſubject into a reliance on Jeſus, and is accompanied with a ſubmiſſion to him as the Lord's Chriſt and an all-ſufficient Saviour. It is of univerſal concern, to repent in the ſenſe of this paſſage; and every one who is pricked in the heart and enquires, what he ſhall do? muſt be exhorted ſo to repent. Dear Reader, it is not thy hearing the word, nor any convictions of ſin, under which thou art troubled; nor is it barely a perſuaſion that Jeſus is the Chriſt, that will ſuffice thee. "God hath ſet him forth a propitiation, through faith "in his blood, to declare his righteouſneſs in the re-

" miſſion of ſins," Rom. iii. 25. This faith thou muſt have. He only that believeth in Jeſus, ſhall obtain pardon and life at his hands. The ſcriptures afford no ideas of remiſſion and juſtification, excluſive of a perſonal faith in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. The promiſe is to him that believeth, and they only, " which be of " faith, are bleſſed with faithful Abraham," Gal. iii. 9. Many are the opinions and diſtinctions which even great and good men have advanced in the world, according to their different conceptions of the methods of grace, which are hard to reconcile; but they muſt all be reduced to this certain truth, moſt clearly revealed in the goſpel, namely, that without repentance there is no remiſſion. And, what leſs can be the concern of a wiſe and faithful preacher reſpecting each of his hearers, than that he ſhould obtain mercy thus to repent and be ſaved? But,

II. NOTE the indiſpenſible duty of every believer to be baptized. This evident truth is contradicted in the practice of thoſe who will not be perſuaded to ſubmit themſelves to the Lord in this divine ordinance. Art thou of this number, my Friend? Seriouſly conſider! Repentance and baptiſm in the name of Jeſus, are inſeparably connected in the character of him to whom an aſſurance of ſalvation is given in the goſpel. " He that believeth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved," Mark xvi. 16. This is the ſubſtance of preaching from the beginning; and theſe God, who knoweth all things, hath joined together in the proclamations of his grace, and it becomes us to unite them in practice. The man that would boldly claim re-

miſſion

miſſion of ſins and the gift of the Spirit, is no more excuſed from baptiſm than from repentance; not that the one or the other is in any ſenſe or degree the meritorious cauſe of pardon, or of the beſtowment of ſpiritual bleſſings, but they are both expreſly and abſolutely included in the deſcription of him that is an heir of the promiſe. And doth not this deſerve thy moſt ſerious attention? A perſon may doubt his own real character, and fear he is not a believer in Chriſt, in proportion to which his comfort is loſt, and he is prevented from chearful obedience; or he may think that what his parents did with him when an infant, is ſufficient to anſwer the demand of the goſpel on them who would hope to be ſaved, and on this perſuaſion be eaſy in his conſcience, yea and be even bold in his profeſſion; but what man can modeſtly ſay or ſoberly think, in a peruſal of the promiſe, that he ſtands aſſured of pardon and life, while he neglects or refuſeth to ſubmit to the authority of Jeſus, by being baptized in his name? It is truly aſtoniſhing, that any one who conſcientiouſly holds a good hope, through grace, of being juſtified in the Lord, can a moment delay his conformity to this plain appointment, and thereby exclude himſelf from a viſible claim in the promiſe of life, through his blood! Far be it to urge on diſciples any opinion or doctrine of men, however piouſly deſigned, but the counſel of God is not to be ſhunned; nor could I count myſelf pure from the blood of all men, if I ſpared to inſiſt on this great command of my Maſter. It is true ordinances are no ſaviours; but, my Friend, if thou art tempted to indifferency about them, remember they are ſacred, and likewiſe binding on all Chriſt's diſciples, and that ſal-

vation is to be obtained in a way of goſpel-obedience. Take heed to thyſelf. Indeed a man may conform to this external appointment of the Saviour, and nevertheleſs, like Simon the ſorcerer, remain in the gaul of bitterneſs and bonds of iniquity; therefore truſt not to any profeſſion whatever, but at the ſame time conſider that no man can ſufficiently prove his repentance or ſubjection of heart to the Redeemer, who refuſes to be baptized in his name. In one word, baptiſm is a plain, eaſy and expreſs inſtitution of our Lord, in the neglect of which no man can yield a compleat evidence of his faith in Chriſt; neither will any works, however uſeful and excellent in their kind, without this work of righteouſneſs (for ſo our Lord ſtiles it) prove that we are his diſciples indeed. "Repent and be baptized every "one of you," is the language of heaven to the end of the world, wherever the goſpel is preached: And a ſkilful and faithful miniſter, however this ordinance may be neglected or deſpiſed in his day, will not be ſatisfied without putting every one of his hearers not only on truſting in Jeſus, but likewiſe on being baptized in his name, as he tenders the glory of Chriſt and his own future joy. But again,

III. It is further to be noted, that in the miniſtration of the goſpel, there is a free and open proclamation of pardon in the name of Chriſt to every penitent ſinner. This known and joyful truth is confirmed by the inſtance before us. Here is no exception or difference. The moſt guilty of thoſe Jeruſalem-tranſgreſſors is aſſured of remiſſion on his repentance; which may ſerve to prevent the malicious and cruel deſign of the enemy

in

in his attempt to diſhearten a ſoul deeply ſenſible of abounding iniquity. Multitudes deſpiſe or neglect divine grace, from light apprehenſions of guilt. The power of ſatan in the minds of the unregenerate lies much in a ſubtil extenuation of ſin; the enemy puts a falſe gloſs on the evil thereof in thought, word and deed; thus covers its baſeneſs and eaſily obtains on apoſtate man, through the deceitfulneſs of his fleſh; inſomuch that, being hardened, he continues unaffected with the glory and importance of ſalvation by Chriſt. But when this flattering peace or ſecurity is broke up, by powerful convictions from the Spirit, the old ſerpent turns the tables upon him; he takes occaſion from his ſenſe of guilt to diſcourage his hope in the mercy of God, and to drive him into deſpair: Now he transforms himſelf into an angel of light; he magnifies the divine juſtice and holineſs, and the righteouſneſs of the law, which is broken, and its rigor as a covenant of works, that men under conviction may apprehend their tranſgreſſions have exceeded the extent of God's mercy in Chriſt. The afflicted, ſelf-condemned ſinner too readily liſtens to theſe inſinuations, and thereby often becomes reduced to the utmoſt extremity. But if any man is under a temptation of this ſort, be it known unto him that the devil is a liar. Theſe ſuggeſtions directly contradict the counſels of heaven, which declare that "where ſin hath abounded, grace doth much more "abound," Rom. v. 20. There are none ſo abandoned and vile in their ſtate of ignorance and unbelief, but, ſeeing themſelves loſt and undone, they are invited to Jeſus for life. God is faithful; and the merit of Chriſt is ſufficient to illuſtrate his righteouſneſs in the

pardon of ſin. "Ho every one that thirſteth, come "ye to the waters," Iſa. lv. 1. And again, ver. 8. "Let the wicked forſake his way and return unto the "Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to "our God, for he will abundantly pardon." And, is not this correſpondent with Peter's encouragement to the Jews on repentance? The infidelity, prophaneneſs, injuſtice and cruelty, which attended their murder of the Son of God, and their treatment of the holy Jeſus as an impoſter and blaſphemer, in oppoſition to the moſt ſtriking and miraculous evidence from heaven of his being the Meſſiah, was a crime the aggravations of which are not to be expreſſed; yet we ſee that among the thouſands charged with this guilt, who were convinced of their wickedneſs, and ſtood in need of a Saviour, every one is directed to ſubmit unto him they had crucified, with a promiſe of ſucceſs. What a pattern is here of the long-ſufferance of God, and the riches of his grace! Say not, O mourning tranſgreſſor, my ſins, which are gone over my head, are too many and great to be forgiven! This is the language of curſed unbelief, and the devil; it makes God a liar in the proclamations of his grace, and is a virtual denial of this amazing inſtance of ſovereign mercy, by which it appears that the divine purpoſe in Chriſt is equal, yea exceeds the moſt accumulated guilt of him that repents. Therefore under whatever ſpecious ſhew the enemy would inſinuate deſpair, reject the temptation as contrary to the truth of God and his Son. It is utterly inexcuſable to deſpair of mercy after theſe declarations and examples of full and free pardon. Unbelief in them to whom the goſpel is ſent, is horrid and fatal;

fatal; it admits of no excuſe, but juſtly expoſes the impenitent ſubject to the ſoreſt condemnation. And further,

IV. The premiſes ſhew that no real penitent is to be refuſed the ordinances of the goſpel, however bad his former converſation may have been. Some plead for open communion, and make light of baptiſm itſelf. If any man appears to them pious, though he is not conformed to that divine inſtitution, they embrace him, and cenſure their brethren who cannot diſpenſe with an ordinance of Chriſt under any conſideration whatever, while they applaud themſelves as perſons of a truly catholic ſpirit; but in fact, a right to chriſtian communion is not entirely grounded in the piety of the ſubject, but requires an open confeſſion of Jeſus, and devotion to him in baptiſm. A man, being called, will hereafter ſit down with the ſaints in the kingdom in heaven, who, yet remaining unbaptized, hath no place in the church on earth. The Lord knows them that are his, and accepts them; but he has commanded his diſciples to be baptized in his name. And, is it the perfection of charity to preſume againſt his expreſs will and pleaſure? But then, on the the other hand, no man, who proves his repentance, is to be denied baptiſm, or being baptized, the privilege of the faithful, merely becauſe he was a notorious tranſgreſſor before converſion. The men of Judea, though guilty of the blood of Jeſus himſelf, on conviction, were directed to baptiſm; and we find them afterward admitted to the fellowſhip of the church. Alſo at Corinth, perſons who had formerly lived in a

moſt ſhameful manner, being ſanctified by grace, are numbered with the ſaints in that city, 1 Cor. vi. 9. Yea and ſome, who once in ignorance, like the apoſtle of the Gentiles, would have deſtroyed the faith, after they were called became ſhining inſtances of holineſs and zeal, to the praiſe of the grace they received. I hope none will abuſe this mercy to their ruin; and far be it hence to inſinuate that churches are not to be careful whom they receive. A profligate ſinner, or one who hath openly oppoſed the truth, if a genuine penitent, will of himſelf afford every poſſible evidence of his converſion; the fruits of which are to be waited for. And a man may be juſtly ſuſpected, who would intrude himſelf on others, who are not ſatisfied of his repentance. But to ſtand off, or to refuſe the right hand of fellowſhip, to one that is truly and viſibly humbled for his ſins, and who gives proper evidence of his faith in the Redeemer, becauſe of his former evil converſation, leſt it ſhould offend or bring a diſgrace on religion, as ſome apprehend, or indeed on any other pretence, however plauſible, ſavors of ignorance and phariſaical pride. This at beſt is no other than carnal reaſon, and contrary to the counſel of God. Chriſt Jeſus came into the world to ſave ſinners, and they who would reject ſuch when penitent, forget that they themſelves were once the ſervants of ſin, they run counter to the manifeſt deſign of the miſſion and incarnation of the Son of God, and the example of all ſcripture-hiſtory. But to proceed,

V. Upon the ſame principle, no repenting ſinner ſhould be afraid or aſhamed to confeſs the Lord Jeſus Chriſt,

Chriſt, becauſe of his paſt rebellion and wickedneſs. It is probable that Saul, while he lay at Damaſcus, feared to own his converſion by putting on Chriſt, becauſe he had blaſphemed his name and perſecuted his people in the time of his ignorance. We know that this was his objection againſt going to Jeruſalem: "Lord, ſaith he, they know that I impriſoned, and "beat in every ſynagogue them that believed on thee; "and when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was ſhed, "I was ſtanding by, conſenting unto his death, and "kept the raiment of them that ſlew him," Acts xxii. 19. Certain it is that a view of his ſinfulneſs occaſioned his delay, as appears from the exhortation of Ananias: "And now why tarrieſt thou? ariſe and be baptized, "and waſh away thy ſins, calling on the name of the "Lord," ver. 16. So then a view of his aggravated guilt hindered him awhile, from a public acknowledgment of the Saviour in baptiſm. For the like reaſon many decline a confeſſion of Chriſt. They have been guilty of ſuch and ſuch heinous tranſgreſſions in life, and therefore they are aſhamed or afraid of making a profeſſion of their faith, but without a cauſe; for as no man is to be refuſed by others, ſo neither ſhould any man himſelf delay baptiſm on account of his notorious bad life in time paſt. If not only Saul the blaſphemer and perſecutor, but alſo every convinced Jew, even though he had been actually concerned in crucifying Chriſt, is directed and encouraged, on repentance, to be baptized in his name, what colour of reaſon can there be for a penitent to decline an open confeſſion of the Lord, or to abſtain from the privileges of the goſpel, becauſe of his vileneſs before converſion?

ſion? And is this thy temptation, dear Reader? Bring forth the fruits of repentance, and fear not to glorify thy Redeemer by a public devotion to his name. He that plucked thee as a brand from the fire, and took away thy filthy garments, hath beſtowed this mercy upon thee, that thou mayeſt appear a monument of his grace in the ſight of the world to his praiſe. Be of good courage: why tarrieſt thou? ariſe and be baptized without further delay. Once more,

Note VI. It is ſufficient encouragement to awakened ſinners, that unto them the word of ſalvation is ſent. This is the argument, and the only argument of the apoſtle with the Jews, to encourage their hope of remiſſion and the gift of the Spirit, on their being baptized. O it is an unſpeakable mercy and joy to a convinced tranſgreſſor who is ready to periſh, when he finds the word of the goſpel directed to him, that he is ſo far from being excluded from the promiſe of life, that Jeſus invites him! This is the firſt ground of hope to the awakened ſinner. Hence he is induced to flee, under all his guilt and unworthineſs, unto him that is able and willing to ſave him; and with the higheſt reaſon, for ſurely a true penitent may ſafely venture on the faithfulneſs and power of God to glorify his righteouſneſs in the pardon, ſanctification and eternal ſalvation of his ſoul, according to his word. And indeed the only ſolid foundation of hope is the teſtimony of God. "I wait for the Lord, and in his word do "I hope," Pſalm cxxx. 5. That hope which is not grounded in the divine word, will never prove an anchor of the ſoul in an hour of temptation. But the periſhing

periſhing ſinner laying hold of the proclamations of grace in Chriſt Jeſus, as directed to him, will not fail, through the aſſiſtance of the Spirit, to hope in the Redeemer, and none ever truſted in him and were aſhamed.

THESE are the truths which clearly reſult from Peter's reply to the earneſt queſtion of the Jews, who applied in diſtreſs under a conviction of their ſins, namely, the infinite importance of being found among thoſe who repent and believe, and their indiſpenſible duty to be baptized in the name of Jeſus. It likewiſe proves that a free and full pardon is opened in the miniſtration of the goſpel to every one that repents, and that no real penitent is to be refuſed the ordinances of Chriſt merely on account of his former bad conduct; neither ſhould he for this reaſon ſhun a profeſſion of his name. And finally it appears that the conſideration of the divine promiſe of life in Jeſus being directed unto him, is a ſufficient ground of encouragement to the awakened ſinner, who is ready to periſh, to truſt in the Lord, and be baptized in his name, in a certain expectation of being ſaved through grace.

THIS is the ſum of the goſpel. And thus our Saviour taught his diſciples, that "it behoved Chriſt to "ſuffer, and to riſe from the dead the third day, and "that repentance and remiſſion of ſins ſhould be "preached in his name among all nations, beginning "at Jeruſalem," Luke xxiv. 46. The report of this grace, in the form of an exhortation, was from the beginning addreſſed to every enquiring hearer of the word.

word. Thus Jeſus himſelf "came into Galilee preach-"ing the goſpel of the kingdom of God,—ſaying, "Repent ye and believe the goſpel," Mark i. 15, 16. And unto the Jews in their blindneſs he ſaith, "Ex-"cept ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh," Luke xiii. 3. And again, "If ye believe not that I am he, "ye ſhall die in your ſins," John viii. 24. This indeed includes a credit of him as the Meſſiah, but carries in it more, even that repentance which ſtands connected with remiſſion of ſins, as appears from the terms of the threatning in caſe of impenitence. Nor is it becoming or ſafe, to leſſen the importance of the repentance and faith univerſally enjoined in the miniſtration of the goſpel, on any pretence whatever. And as Chriſt himſelf, ſo did his apoſtles preach the goſpel to every one wherever they went. This account Paul gives of his miniſtry in his appeal to the elders of Epheſus, Acts xx. 21. teſtifying, διαμαρτυρόμενος; not ſimply publiſhing the doctrine, nor barely ſhewing the neceſſity of "repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord "Jeſus Chriſt." The word ſignifies to call upon or charge the object addreſſed; and thus it is uſed by the apoſtle to Timothy, 2 epiſtle iv. 1. "I charge thee "therefore before God, &c." This Paul did both to Jews and Greeks, not only ſhewing them that repentance was needful to the remiſſion of ſins, but ſtirring them up to repent; which agrees with what he declares to Agrippa in the court of Ceſaria, chap. xxvi. 20. namely, that he "ſhewed firſt to them at Damaſcus, "and at Jeruſalem, and throughout all the coaſts of "Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they ſhould "repent and turn to God, and do works meet for re-"pentance."

"pentance." In like manner, in the inſtance before us, Peter's exhortation indeed was occaſioned by the enquiry of perſons convinced of their need of a Saviour; and no one without ſuch conviction can poſſibly truſt in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt; yet the apoſtle's addreſs extends to the whole of his audience, and his argument comprehends every Jew to whom the promiſe belonged, even all the houſe of Iſrael, and every one in particular, preſent or abſent, under the like conviction, is exhorted and encouraged by theſe words of Peter, to repent and be baptized in the name of Jeſus for the remiſſion of ſins. It is the office of the Spirit to convince men of ſin; neither will any turn to the Lord, who are not ready to periſh, and faith itſelf is the gift of God; hence they only in whom a divine power is exerted, will obey this external call in the goſpel; yet every one is called, and ought to be intreated and charged to repent and believe, that is, as a periſhing ſinner to flee unto Jeſus, who is the only and all-ſufficient Saviour, according to ancient prophecy, Iſa. xlv. 22. "Look "unto me, all ye ends of the earth, and be ſaved." Thus to the end of the world the goſpel is preached to every creature, that the Lord working effectually in the hearts of his choſen, may grant them repentance unto life, and bring them to the obedience of faith.

And now, my dear Reader, what doſt thou think of theſe things, or thyſelf? Haſt thou long ſat under the report of the goſpel unconcerned and impenitent? how hard is thine heart, and how great is thy danger! thou art yet in thy ſins, ſenſual in thy ſtate, and void of the

the Spirit; and if death overtakes thee in this ſad condition, thou art forever undone! Conſider, I beſeech thee; the Judge is at the door, and this night thy ſoul may be required at thine hands. The ſoul out of Chriſt muſt periſh; in which dreadful caſe thy blood will be upon thee, the weight of which will ſink thee in the bottomleſs gulph of perdition! O then repent and flee unto Jeſus; there is no other name under heaven whereby thou canſt be ſaved. Precious and wonderful are the bleſſings of pardon and ſanctification ſet forth in the goſpel: To be a partaker of theſe is of the utmoſt conſequence to every man; yet alas, how lightly eſteemed, how greatly neglected and deſpiſed! Whence is it that the leaſt proſpect of temporal riches and pleaſure, or earthly enjoyments, things comparitively trifling and vain, immediately ſtrike thy attention; while alas, the unſearchable riches of Chriſt, remiſſion of ſins, and the Holy Ghoſt, (gifts of infinite value in themſelves, and of no leſs importance) are ſo obviouſly and ſhamefully ſlighted? The moment the things of this world are reported in the ear, and propoſed to a man, he feels in himſelf a deſire, perhaps an unlawful deſire, of the object; and in proportion to the confidence he hath of obtaining it, he is prone to an exceſs of joy; whereas the report of theſe ſpiritual bleſſings, neceſſary to the fruition of God, are heard by moſt without any emmotion of heart, or even the leaſt concern about a perſonal intereſt in them.

STRANGE and lamentable this! yet perfectly natural to a mind that is blinded by the god of this world, and hardened

hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin. The conſcience of an unregenerate man is not duly if at all affected with his native guilt and pollution, or the righteouſneſs of God, or judgment to come. Hence the grace of the goſpel cannot raiſe his attention or engage his purſuit. If this is thy caſe, may the Lord open thine eyes, and grant thee a ſight of thy real condition. But if thou art now ſaying in thine heart, under a deep ſenſe of thine iniquity, What ſhall I do? To thee this word of ſalvation is ſent. It is the word of the Lord which abideth for ever, and the voice of God to every one by the miniſtration of his goſpel: "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jeſus "Chriſt, for the remiſſion of ſins." And, as God is true, "he that believeth and is baptized, ſhall be "ſaved."

To conclude. Remiſſion of ſins, and emiſſion of the Holy Ghoſt, are the two capital bleſſings of the goſpel. To procure theſe the Son of God was manifeſt in the fleſh, and became obedient to the death of the croſs. Thy Saviour, O Chriſtian, ſuffered and died a ſacrifice for ſin, that juſtice being ſatisfied by his complete atonement, the divine holineſs might be vindicated in beſtowing grace on the choſen. Hence, as we have ſeen, the Redeemer having finiſhed his work, aſcended to the Father; and upon receiving the promiſe of the Spirit, he ſhed him forth on the diſciples, that repentance and remiſſion of ſins might be preached in his name, for the converſion and joy of the redeemed among men. And, art thou a partaker of this heavenly

calling?

calling? give diligence to prove it; "be of good chear, "thy ſins are forgiven thee." But remember that "to whom much is forgiven, the ſame loveth much." Abound then in theſe fruits of love, that thy faith may appear, and grace may be magnified in thine eternal ſalvation.

LECTURE XIV.

The converted Jews teſtify their reception of the goſpel, in being baptized and joining the church. Notes on their viſible obedience to the faith.

THE further we advance, the more we have reaſon to admire! It was truly aſtoniſhing that remiſſion of ſins ſhould be preached in the name of Jeſus to them who had been guilty of his blood, and that any of them, in diſtreſs, ſhould apply to his apoſtles for advice; but ſtill more extraordinary is the real converſion of a multitude, who had defied every kind of external evidence to his character as the Meſſiah, and even gloried in having procured his execution. To behold thouſands of theſe murderers of the Lord take up the croſs in an open confeſſion of his name, whom they had lately put to death as an impoſter, may juſtly ſtrike us with wonder; yet this was, through the power of God, the effect of Peter's diſcourſe; for we read, Acts ii. 41. "Then they that gladly received the word were bap-"tized; and the ſame day there were added unto them

"about

"about three thouſand ſouls." Thus the omnipotent arm of ſovereign grace is ever victorious, and it came to paſs as the prophet foretold, "Thy people ſhall be "willing in the day of thy power." The particulars of this remarkable account being opened, will lead us to ſeveral points eſſential to the experience and duty of them who are effectually called.

FIRST, We are told that they *received* his word, i. e. believed the goſpel he preached. In believing there is a reception of the word and of Chriſt revealed in it. And accordingly in John i. 12. they who received him, are the ſame with thoſe who believed on his name; which agrees with what our Lord ſays in his addreſs to the Father concerning his diſciples: "I "have given them thy words, and they have received "them," John xvii. 8.

UNBELIEVERS reject the word of ſalvation, and like many at Antioch, Acts xiii. 46. put it from them, and thereby judge themſelves unworthy of everlaſting life. But theſe men, being awakened and convinced, believed the report, and accounting it a faithful ſaying and worthy of all acceptation, embraced and applied it. They were helped, through grace, to "receive the "engrafted word, which is able to ſave our ſouls." And that to receive the word in the ſenſe of this place, carries in it nothing leſs than the obedience of faith, or a receiving Chriſt Jeſus the Lord, appears from the event.

NOTE again. The manner in which they embraced the goſpel of Chriſt, namely, with pleaſure. "Then

" they that gladly received his word." They received it with all readineſs of mind. As Zaccheus, when called by the Saviour from the ſycamore-tree, " he made " haſte and came down and received him joyfully," Luke xix. 6. Thus the people of Galilee, who waited for Jeſus when he returned from the country of the Gadarenes, gladly received him again: So when the word is mixed with faith, it is attended with joy in the Holy Ghoſt, 1 Theſſ. vi. 1. Some joy of heart hath been felt by that man who knows the ſound of the goſpel, which is joyful tidings to the periſhing ſinner. Thy frame, chriſtian Reader, may at preſent be ſorrowful; but once, when firſt the promiſe of remiſſion was received, it gladdened thine heart. And this was the experience of David: " Thy teſtimonies have I taken " as my heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing " of my heart," Pſalm cxix. 111. And again: " I " rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great ſpoil," ver. 162. which agrees with Matt. xiii. 44. " The " kingdom of heaven is like unto a treaſure hid in a " field; the which when a man hath found he hideth, " and for joy thereof goeth and ſelleth all that he hath, " and buyeth that field." Such is the effect of the goſpel, when it is the power of God unto the ſalvation of a man that believes; he gladly receives it.

Now they who indeed thus obey from the heart this form of doctrine, are naturally willing to teſtify the ſame in every act of external obedience; and accordingly theſe Jews were immediately baptized, and thereby openly and readily acknowledged Chriſt Jeſus the Lord. Baptiſm is one part of the counſel of God, which the apoſtle

apoſtle had declared. The miniſters of Chriſt are to teach not barely repentance, but the baptiſm of repentance for the remiſſion of ſins, i. e. it becomes them to direct all who repent, to be baptized on a confeſſion of their guilt and their faith in the Meſſiah. In this manner John baptiſt began in the wilderneſs, "baptizing with the baptiſm of repentance, ſaying to the "people, that they ſhould believe on him that ſhould "come after him, that is, on Chriſt Jeſus," Acts xix. 4. And after the Lord was riſen, he ſent forth his apoſtles, ſaying, "Go ye into all the world, and "preach the goſpel to every creature. He that be-"lieveth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved," Mark xvi. 15, 16. This agrees with the hiſtory of the eunuch, in which it appears that Philip had in his diſcourſe treated on the doctrine of baptiſm, on a profeſſion of faith. Hence he takes the firſt opportunity to propoſe himſelf, and this is the reply of his ſpiritual guide: "If thou believeſt with all thine heart, thou mayeſt," Acts viii. 36, 37. Thus they who receive the word are to call on the name of the Lord; "for with the "heart man believeth unto righteouſneſs, and with the "mouth confeſſion is made unto ſalvation," Rom. x. 10. And this evidence theſe Jeruſalem-converts gave of their having received the goſpel they had heard; they ſurrendered to Jeſus, and owned themſelves his diſciples; "for as many of you as have been baptized into "Chriſt, have put on Chriſt," Gal. iii. 27.

FROM their baptiſm the apoſtle proceeds to their union with the church; "there were added unto "them," i. e. to the church, as appears from ver 47.

He that is baptized in the name of Jeſus, is become his viſible ſubject, and is formally meet for the communion of ſaints in his houſe; he is as it were now openly in the kingdom of God's dear Son, and a diſciple of the Redeemer; but no man commences a member of a chriſtian church, in which alone the ſeat of government and goſpel-order is found, purely by his being baptized. Indeed every one thus prepared, whoſe character anſwers to his holy profeſſion, and who is capable of the duties and ends of this ſpiritual communion, is to be received; but there is no neceſſary connexion between a man's baptiſm and his relation to any particular church. He that is baptized is both entitled and obliged to chriſtian communion, but in order to this, an union is needful; the manner of which is clear from 2 Cor. viii. 5. "They firſt gave their own ſelves unto "the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." To the ſame purpoſe is Rom. xv. 7. "Wherefore receive ye "one another, as Chriſt alſo received us, to the glory "of God." So then the formal bond of church-fellowſhip is mutual conſent. No baptized perſon, who in the judgment of charity is a believer, is on any account to be refuſed; neither his poverty, nor the weakneſs of his faith, nor his being a babe in ſpiritual underſtanding, nor any other circumſtance whatever, may hinder the acceptance of him who hath learned Chriſt; and, being baptized in his name, has a competent knowledge of the nature and deſign of chriſtian communion: This is manifeſt from John i. 12. mentioned already. "But to as many as received him, "to them gave he power (or privilege) to become the "ſons of God." What leſs can be intended by this

power

power than a right to ſhare with the diſciples in every privilege of the goſpel? Therefore as many as believe on his name are entitled thereto. But ſtill the conſent of the parties is required to conſtitute a perſon a member of a particular chriſtian ſociety; he muſt propoſe, and they muſt accept, in the name of the Lord. While therefore we avoid the pride of Diſtrophes, and by no means reject a brother in Chriſt, or caſt him out of the church; on the other hand, let us take heed that under a notion of charity we do not countenance diſorder. No man can be conſtrained againſt his own will unto this relation in any goſpel-church; and a pretence of right to intrude into the ſociety of the faithful without a full ſatisfaction as to a meetneſs for communion, is againſt the dictates of reaſon and ſcripture, and particularly the example of Saul, that eminent inſtance of ſovereign and omnipotent grace: After his calling and baptiſm he was not joined to the diſciples till they, being perſuaded of his converſion and character, gave him the right hand of fellowſhip. And if this was required in the primitive times, and among the apoſtles, who were to ſeparate and go into different parts of the world for the ſpread of the goſpel, much more ought believers, who are to continue together in the order of Chriſt, to be ſatisfied in them whom they lay into their boſom. So then you ſee that there muſt be a joining by mutual conſent, in order to the communion of ſaints in a chriſtian church-ſtate. And in this manner, no doubt, theſe Jews, when baptized, were added to the church.

THE apoſtle having noted their admiſſion, goes on to mention their number; not indeed preciſely, but a

few more or leſs; about three thouſand ſouls. A very large gathering indeed! Now came to paſs what our Lord told Peter and John, when he called them from their nets, Matt. iv. 19. "Follow me, and I will make "you fiſhers of men." The miraculous draught at the ſea of Tiberias, which the diſciples could ſcarce drag to ſhore, was but a ſhadow of this, taken up by the net of the goſpel. The fields were now white, and the reaper ſoon rejoiced with his ſheaves! What an harveſt of ſouls was here collected into the kingdom of heaven! May we not juſtly admire, and eſpecially when we conſider that all theſe were gathered and joined to the Lord the ſame day? This is a marvellous circumſtance, but it was the Lord's doing; and who ſhall limit the power of God? It is eaſy with Jehovah to convert any number, in whatever ſpace, at his pleaſure. In a day or in a hour, yea in a moment, the victorious arm of his grace can ſubdue the heart of a ſinner, and even turn the diſobedient in thouſands to the wiſdom of the juſt! Had the change depended on the preacher, this extraordinary account might have been queſtioned; but ſince the work is divine, if any man doubt, the anſwer is ready; it is the ſame as in the caſe of the reſurrection. Why ſhould it be thought a thing incredible with you that God ſhould quicken ſo great a number of ſouls in a day? Is any thing too hard for the Almighty? Cannot he at his will, in an inſtant, reduce a multitude of unbelievers to the obedience of the faith? Surely with God all things are poſſible. Some, indeed, have queried whether ſo many perſons could be baptized in a day; though it appears not improbable to them who conſider the number of baths

at

at Jeruſalem, and that the apoſtles had hands more than ſufficient to accompliſh this work from eleven in the morning, by which time it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe Peter had finiſhed his ſermon. But whatever difficulty is made about the baptizing theſe perſons, there can be no room to heſitate concerning the power of God to convert them within the time abovementioned.

ONCE more, obſerve; this account is univerſal and particular: They all and every one gladly received the word; none but thoſe who received the word were baptized; and no one baptized in the name of Jeſus on this teſtimony was refuſed a place in the church, but was freely admitted. Such is the order of the goſpel; nor can it be ſhewn from the New-Teſtament that any perſon was admitted to baptiſm who received not the word of the Lord, or that an unbaptized perſon was at any time joined to the church. This is the ſum of the account. A number of ſinners at Jeruſalem, to the amount of about three thouſand, hearing from Peter the good tidings of remiſſion of ſins, were enabled to believe; and in teſtimony of their cordial acceptance of the goſpel, openly confeſſed Jeſus Chriſt, and being in his name baptized, they were immediately added to the church by mutual conſent. Here it may be uſeful to pauſe and reflect.

IN this glorious event we have a wonderful diſplay of the ſovereignty, power, grace and faithfulneſs, of God. Here is diſtinguiſhing mercy, they and not others. Thouſands were converted; but there is reaſon to conclude that many more thouſands, who heard

the ſame ſermon remained in unbelief. Again, how adorable the power of God in the ſudden converſion of ſo many ſtu born unbelievers, who had acted againſt the moſt ſtriking teſtimonies of the Father to his well-beloved Son; and to call home and pardon theſe daring and bloody tranſgreſſors, who had murdered the Prince of life and crucified the Lord of glory! This was alſo rich grace indeed. Nor can we too much admire the faithfulneſs of God in thus accompliſhing the promiſes he had given to his church. Now it came to paſs that in even-tide it was light. How did he multiply the nation and increaſe their joy! Their joy before him was truly according to the joy of harveſt; and they triumphed in Chriſt as men rejoice when they divide the ſpoil, Iſa. ix. 3. Alas, how different is the face of things now! Now a miniſter of the goſpel can truly mourn with the prophet, Micah vii. 1. and lament, ſaying, "Woe is me, for I am as when they have ga-"thered the ſummer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of "the vintage!" Here and there an inſtance, for the Lord hath not utterly forſaken us. And if any judgment is to be formed by the example of theſe converts, how few gladly receive the word! Few indeed, comparatively ſpeaking, are baptized and added to the church! In this reſpect there is but little even of the form of godlineſs among us. The generality of hearers ſeem to have no inclination to obey. O that they had hearts to turn their feet unto the teſtimonies of the Lord, and would glorify Chriſt in a profeſſed ſubjection to his goſpel! But in vain do miniſters now wiſh and pray; in vain are ſtrong arguments and earneſt intreaties with many who would be thought chriſtians;

ſtians; they regard not the order of the goſpel, as if chriſtianity could be promoted without a church-ſtate, or there was neither authority, wiſdom or grace, in the appointments of the Lord! Nevertheleſs God is able and faithful to revive us again. Let us not deſpond and ſay, our bones are dried, our hope is loſt! The divine power and grace, manifeſted in the converſion of this multitude, ſhould encourage us to hope and wait for the pouring out of the Spirit from on high; then ſhall our wilderneſs become as a fruitful field. Many will then embrace the word with joy, and become obedient to the faith, to the glory of God, and the increaſe of his viſible kingdom.

BUT for the direction and encouragement of thoſe who are doubtful of their ſtate, or negligent of their duty to Chriſt, I ſhall attempt a more particular improvement of this original example, which manifeſtly preſents us with the following truths, namely,

I. THAT a ſaving reception of the word is accompanied with joy.

II. IT becomes every one, who hath obtained mercy to believe and embrace the goſpel, to be immediately baptized in the name of Jeſus. And,

III. HE that gladly receives the word, and is baptized into Chriſt, is obliged and entitled to the communion of ſaints, and ſhould accordingly be joined to the church.

We have ſeen that the example of theſe converts agrees with many other inſtances on record, which abundantly ſhew that a reception of the word is attended with joy, and prove the firſt propoſition; and indeed, in the nature of the thing, it cannot be otherwiſe. The tidings of peace, pardon, liberty, ſalvation, and victory, muſt convey joy to the ſubject; but all theſe are included in the voice of a reconciled God to periſhing ſinners by the goſpel of his Son. The man who is unacquainted with the evil of ſin, and his own ſad condition under its power and curſe, may take up with a notion of evangelical truth, and be a ſtranger to the gladneſs felt by theſe converts; but he that has been laid under a deep conviction of his miſery and guilt, and, like the men of Judea, pricked in the heart, under a ſenſe of his heinous iniquity, cannot fail of rejoicing in the knowledge of ſalvation by the remiſſion of ſins. Can a proclamation of liberty to the captive, pardon to the condemned, and glory to them who are covered with ſhame as children of wrath, be received without joy? it is utterly impoſſible. They who are ready to periſh cannot but rejoice in a proſpect of deliverance, in proportion to the danger apprehended, and the certainty and compleatneſs of the ſalvation revealed. In one word; it is goſpel that is received, and eſſentially a joyful ſound, and therefore it muſt in ſome degree rejoice thoſe who embrace it.

And as to the other obſervations, they are no leſs confirmed by the teſtimony of ſcripture. It is implied in the general report of the goſpel, "He that believ-

"eth

" eth and is baptized ſhall be ſaved." And the commiſſion of our Lord to teach and baptize, proves the obligation of baptiſm on them that are taught. And it is plain from the exhortation of Ananias to Saul when he lingered, Acts xxii. 16. that no enlightened perſon, under any pretence, ſhould delay his ſubmiſſion to Chriſt, or be refuſed his ſacred appointments. And, however ſome may excuſe themſelves, and are not to be perſuaded unto this obedience, it appears from the readineſs of theſe men at Jeruſalem, and the jailor and his houſe on the like occaſion, and eſpecially when joined to that of the eunuch, Acts viii. 36. I ſay, it appears but natural to thoſe who receive the word gladly by a cordial faith, to be forward in preſenting themſelves as the ſubjects of baptiſm. Nothing can be more evident than that he who receiveth the engrafted word ſhould immediately conform to this divine inſtitution. And that it becomes a baptized believer to be joined to the church the firſt opportunity, is not to be doubted, ſince he is baptized in order to this communion of ſaints, and the obſervance of whatever the Lord hath commanded; ſo that a man who, after he has ſubmitted to this ordinance, neglects the ſacred fellowſhip, defeats one end of his baptiſm, and comes ſhort of his engagements in that ſolemn devotion of himſelf to the Lord, as well as to the uniform practice of the primitive chriſtians.

SINCE therefore it cannot be modeſtly queſtioned that it is the expreſs will of God, and agreeable to the conduct of ſuch who were enlightened from the beginning, that they who embrace the goſpel ſhould without

without delay be baptized and added to the church, it may be preſumed that few will controvert theſe points, but at the ſame time, as obſerved, the far greater number of hearers obey not the truth, among which we may hope there are many to whom the word of the Lord is precious; ſuch perſons are for the moſt part fearful of their meetneſs for theſe holy appointments. When one and another is aſked why, upon a good hope through grace, he remains without practical and viſible ſubjection to Chriſt, whom he eſteems as his Lord? The common reply is, I fear I am not ſufficiently qualified; I am unworthy, and not duly prepared for theſe inſtitutions. And here, it muſt be owned, that men ſhould take heed that they do not precipitate into any form of religion. A formal profeſſion, without the life and power of godlineſs, avails not the hypocrite; nor will a blind devotion, however exact and externally regular, ſave any man; yet under this pretence, ſhall any true chriſtian omit the appointments of his Redeemer? And ſince we have before us a criterion of real chriſtianity, and conſequently of an undeniable fitneſs for goſpel-ordinances, I beg the ſcrupulous believer to credit me awhile till I have an opportunity of purſuing the intereſting point in another lecture or two; in his attendance on which, I truſt, by the bleſſing of God, his doubts may be removed to his full ſatisfaction.

LECTURE XV.

What is included in a ſaving reception of the word, and the manner in which it is embraced.

FROM the ſtriking example of the firſt converts at Jeruſalem, and other like inſtances, it appears that the word is embraced with joy, and that every one who receives it, ſhould be immediately baptized, and joined to the church. Points which are ſcarcely debated. Neverthelefs, how rarely are the waters of the baptiſtery uſed; and how few, in compariſon, appear before the Lord with the ſacrifice of praiſe, and ſit at his table! Now this muſt be owing, either to a neglect of the goſpel, or to ſome groundleſs ſcruple in them that embrace it, whereby they are prevented from conforming to this holy profeſſion. But the inſtance of the Jews, who were baptized at the direction of Peter, is a ſufficient reply to the ſerious enquirer: It reduces the point to this ſingle queſtion, namely, Have I in like manner received the word? If conſcience anſwers in the affirmative, every juſt objection is removed, and the ſubject muſt find relief from his fears, and a warrant to appear under that form of godlineſs which becomes the diſciples of Jeſus. With a view, therefore, to aſſiſt thoſe who are doubtful, and to animate the ſincere penitent unto a chearful obedience, I ſhall particularly conſider the character and experience of thoſe who were baptized and

and joined to the Lord at Jeruſalem, and ſhew the obligation of them who have obtained the like mercy to copy this original pattern.

THE principal and intereſting branch of my ſubject is the deſcription of thoſe who willingly offered themſelves, and were added to the church. He that finds himſelf anſwer to this, will readily follow their example, and eſpecially when he conſiders the obligations upon him, which are hereafter to be named. Now theſe primitive diſciples are repreſented as having gladly received his word. To a full diſplay of which it may be uſeful to ſhew, what is included in a ſaving reception of the truth, how or in what manner a perſon gladly receives it, the ſource of that joy which they feel. And, as a further illuſtration of the point, I ſhall mention the genuine ſymptoms of this bleſſed experience. Now a cordial reception of the goſpel carries in it,

1. An underſtanding in Chriſt, and the things which belong to his kingdom. "He that receiveth "the ſeed into good ground, is he that heareth the "word and underſtandeth it," Matt. xiii. 23. Such is the profitable hearer, who embraces the goſpel in his heart. This was the experience of the faithful of old. Hence ſaith David, "The entrance of thy word giv-"eth light, it giveth underſtanding to the ſimple," Pſalm cxix. 130. And in verſe 25, he prayeth, ſaying, "Give me underſtanding that I may know thy "teſtimonies." Some are greatly offended that man in his natural ſtate is repreſented void of underſtanding.

ing. Yet thus ſaith the ſcripture, which cannot be broken, Rom. i. 31. "without underſtanding." And again, chap. iii. 11. "There is none that underſtand-"eth." To the ſame purpoſe is Epheſ. iv. 18. "Their underſtanding is darkened." Yea ſaith the prophet, Pſalm lxxx. 5. "They know not, neither "will they underſtand." A natural man may know all language, and be a profound critic in the letter of ſcripture: He may alſo attain to an accurate knowledge of every doctrine therein revealed; nevertheleſs, darkneſs hath blinded his eyes, he is ſpiritually blind; for with all his natural advantages, he cannot diſcern or diſtinguiſh the glory and importance of the goſpel; he hath ears but heareth not; and is in the ſame ſituation with the Jews, to whom our Lord thus declares, John viii. 43. "Why do ye not underſtand "my ſpeech? even becauſe ye cannot hear my word." Thus the mind of the unregenerate hearer labours under inſuperable prejudices, inſomuch that he is incapable, without a change, of beholding the glory of the Lord, and the wiſdom of God in his goſpel. To which impotence, in reſpect of divine knowledge, the apoſtle is as plain as words can expreſs it. "The "natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit "of God, they are fooliſhneſs unto him; neither can "he know them, becauſe they are ſpiritually diſcern-"ed," 1 Cor. ii. 14. This is the ſad ſtate of the carnal man; he heareth the word of the kingdom, but our Lord expreſsly declares, he underſtandeth it not. So that in whatever ſenſe unprofitable hearers may be ſaid to receive the word, or to have it ſown in their hearts, they are certainly deſtitute of a capa-

city

city of diſcerning the things of the Spirit. But this is the criterion of him who receiveth he word to life everlaſting, that he underſtandeth it; and by this he ſtands diſtinguiſhed from all other hearers. He hath what is ſtiled, Col. i. 9. a ſpiritual underſtanding, which is eſſential unto a ſaving reception of the goſpel, and is the effect of divine illumination. Hence the prayer of the apoſtle, 2 Tim. xii. 7. "And the Lord give thee "underſtanding in all things." In one word, God hath given to him that is called, an underſtanding to "know him that is true." Without this gift of God, no man can receive the word in the joyful manner theſe converts did.

AGAIN, faith is eſſential to this bleſſed experience. Concerning thoſe who periſhed under the former diſpenſation we read, Heb. iv. 2. that "the word "preached did not profit them, not being mixed with "faith in them that heard it." The alluſion is to a mingling two or more things until they incorporate. In like manner, when the word is mixed with faith, it is not only received into the underſtanding, but extends to all the powers of the ſoul, ſo that the heart is conformed and united therewith. Thus runs the margin of many copies, "becauſe they were not "united by faith." A ſimple idea of the truth, however clear and diſtinct, yea and though attended with the higheſt credit of its veracity, is not ſufficient. The heart muſt be deeply impreſſed, and as it were transformed into the doctrine of Chriſt. Indeed this ſuppoſes an enlightened underſtanding, and a perſuaſion of the exiſtence and glory of the things which are revealed

vealed, without which it is impoſſible to receive them into the heart. But a profitable reception of the word, by faith, implies more than a bare underſtanding, which in itſelf cannot produce a ſufficient alteration in the ſubject. The whole heart is concerned in this divine exerciſe, as appears from Rom. vi. 17. "Ye "have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine "which was delivered unto you;" or as it is read, "unto which you was delivered." Where much the ſame idea is conveyed by an alluſion to metal caſt in a mould, which receives the impreſſion of its type, and comes out with its likeneſs: So is the heart tranſformed when the word is united by faith; yea and ſtill more, it as it were incorporates with it, ſo that the things of the goſpel hath an exiſtence in the ſubject, as the great Dr. Owen obſerves on Heb. xi. 1. "It is the ſubſtance of things hoped for." Faith, mixing with a preached goſpel, gives a kind of ſubſiſtence of what is promiſed in the heart of the believer; it is alſo, ſaith the apoſtle, "the evidence "of things not ſeen." The ſubject hath the witneſs in himſelf, and a ſubſtantial evidence of the truth in his own experience. So then the word thus received, under the influence of divine grace, becomes united with, and transforms the ſubject in a manner not unlike that of natural food, which by incorporating with the body, is a means to ſuſtain and invigorate animal life. It is true, this divine operation is wonderful, the modus of which is not to be explained; but this is no juſt objection, ſince the like muſt be owned of the manner in which the food of the body unites and ſuſtains it. The learned

may deſcribe or dilate on digeſtion, ſecretion, ſeparation, nutrition, &c. with more or leſs certainty; yet after all it is allowed that nature is a myſtery in reſpect of her actual incorporation of food as it were into herſelf, but that the body is ſuſtained in this manner, will ſcarce be denied. And the ſame idea is conveyed by the word being mixed with faith in the heart, as likewiſe when the goſpel is compared to food, and Chriſt to the bread of life, and alſo when faith in him is repreſented under the notion of eating his fleſh and drinking his blood. Spiritual and natural eating are indeed eſſentially different, and to compare the former in every circumſtance with the latter would be abſurd; but if in any particular they agree, it is in this, that each invigorate the life to which it is adapted, by being received into and incorporating with the ſubject; and this ſeems the purport of that remarkable paſſage, 2 Pet. i. 4, where, ſpeaking of the exceeding great and precious promiſes which are given us by the goſpel, he ſaith, "that by theſe ye "might be partakers of the divine nature." Theſe promiſes, embraced with faith, became a means, under the agency of the Spirit, of transforming the ſoul into the divine image. Hence holineſs, humility, and the love of God, appear in the ſubject, to the praiſe of his grace who hath called him.

It follows, that the affections are included in receiving the word, as obſerved; it reaches the heart. 'Faith (ſays an excellent divine) ſets love to work 'upon the objects propoſed to be believed.' And the apoſtle gives this criterion of the chriſtian faith, that

that it worketh by love, Gal. v. 6. It therefore touches the inward ſprings of the ſoul, and draws out the affections towards God and Chriſt, and the things of the Spirit. This is the faith which, being mixed with the word, renders it effectual to promoting the divine life in the ſoul. Thus all the powers of the mind are engaged, and the believer receives the love of the truth that he might be ſaved, 2 Theſſ. ii. 10. And, indeed, love to the truth and to Chriſt is inſeparable, from a taſte of his grace. There is no receiving the word with a due ſenſe of its glory and importance, and mixing it with faith, which implies ſome degree of hope in the bleſſings revealed, without a ſincere, univerſal and ſuperlative affection, which every one more or leſs feels on embracing the goſpel; ſo that the religion of a real chriſtian is rooted and grounded in love from the beginning.

And further, this includes a ſincere and univerſal obedience. Hence believers are deſcribed as obedient to the faith, Acts vi. 7. And Peter, 1 epiſ. i. 21. thus exhorts the diſciples: "Seeing you have purified "your ſouls in obeying the truth, thro' the Spirit, ſee "that ye love one another, &c." On the other hand, they who reject the counſel of God are pronounced diſobedient, and are complained of as not obeying the goſpel. In receiving the word there is not only a ſubmiſſion to the righteouſneſs of God, but the perſon reſigns himſelf unto Jeſus as his Lord, and becomes a willing ſubject of his kingdom. Thus in Col. ii. 6. it is ſtiled, receiving Chriſt Jeſus the Lord, i. e. to be diſpoſed and governed by him in all things.

He that cordially embraces the goſpel ſurrenders himſelf unto Jeſus, and the language of his heart is with Saul, who, when converted, cries out, "Lord, what "wilt thou have me to do?" And I need only ſay, that in the natural courſe of things this devotion of ſoul to the Redeemer will iſſue in external obedience. Thus when the word is the power of God to ſalvation, it is received into the underſtanding, mixed with faith, engages the heart of the ſubject, and is attended with an unfeigned obedience to Chriſt.

Now he that has obtained mercy thus to believe the word of the goſpel, will appear, on reflection, to have received it in the following manner:

First, with a full perſuaſion of its true and proper divinity: "For our goſpel came not unto you "in word only, but alſo in power, and in the Ho-"ly Ghoſt, and in much aſſurance," 1 Theſſ. i. 5. i. e. of its divine original and authority; "becauſe "ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, "ye received it not as the word of men, but as it "is in truth the word of God," chap. xi. 13. And this they did not barely from any external evidence whatever, but from an inward experience of its power, for the apoſtle adds, "which effectually worketh in "you that believe." The word comes with a divine authority into the heart, and commends itſelf to the conſcience. Hence though the preaching of the croſs is to them that periſh fooliſhneſs, yet "unto them "that are called it is the wiſdom of God and the "power of God." They receive the word as from

the

the Lord, and every doctrine is embraced in his name; and its being thus apprehended, is the very ground of their faith, affection and obedience, which ſtand, not in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of God. It is this divine voice they hear, and this alone conquers the ſoul and compels the heart to obedience. So that the believer has an eye to the ſupreme authority of God; and in receiving his word he ſubmits to and relies upon him as the all-perfect Jehovah and Sovereign of his creatures, who has a right to demand his obedience, and whoſe faithfulneſs never can fail. In a word; this reception of the goſpel we are ſpeaking of, carries in it that abſolute dependence, and that unreſerved ſubjection, which is due to God only, and therefore muſt be grounded on his authority; for it would be unlawful to yield in this manner to any mere creature. But again,

THE word thus received is alſo embraced inſtantaneouſly. "The kingdom of heaven (ſaith our Lord) "is like unto a merchant-man ſeeking goodly pearls, "who when he had found one pearl of great price, "he went and ſold all that he had, and bought it," Matt. xiii. 45, 46. The truth of God is not like the opinion of man, to be deliberated upon and cautiouſly received; what comes with a divine authority to the conſcience, admits no debate. No ſooner doth the entrance of the word enlighten the mind and poſſeſs it with the knowledge of the glory of God in the perſon of Chriſt, but the heart is ſubdued and obeys. And the reaſon is plain; for if a man could doubt a moment whether or not he ſhall obey divine

truth, he would prove himſelf perverſe, and in a ſtate of rebellion againſt God.

AND further. The word is embraced in an eager and reſolute manner, with the utmoſt willingneſs * of heart. Such is the nature and importance of the goſpel, that it cannot be duly received with indifference. A reception of the word in the ſenſe we are upon, as hinted before, terminates in faith, and includes that coming to Chriſt or receiving of him, which is the ſame with believing on his name. The truth is received by thoſe who are ready to periſh, and to ſuch it muſt be as life from the dead. The frame of the penitent ſinner towards the word, when he layeth hold of the promiſe and fleeth to Chriſt for life, will in ſome degree anſwer to the importance of that concern he has in it, which is no leſs than that of being delivered from wrath to come, and the obtaining of life everlaſting. This good news is as cold waters to a thirſty ſoul; and he muſt be thirſty that drinks it. Nor are the invitations of the goſpel given to any other. So then the word is received with a longing heart, and with a holy reſolution to renounce every thing for the ſake of Chriſt and the righteouſneſs of God in him.

MOREOVER, the goſpel is received with unfeigned contrition of ſoul. Indeed when it enters the heart it relieves from the ſorrows of a guilty conſcience; it heals the ſubject of thoſe wounds which the terrors of the Almighty have made under legal conviction, and

* ἀσμένως; libenter, the word rendered gladly in the text.

and fills him with peace through faith in the blood of the Saviour, but at the ſame time it opens the ſluices of evangelical repentance. Remiſſion is received with the profoundeſt humility; for the ſubject being melted under a ſenſe of divine love, is deeply affected with his own unworthineſs, and mourns with ſelf-abaſement for the evil of his many tranſgreſſions, which are freely forgiven him. Hence alſo he is filled with admiration at the rich grace of God beſtowed on him.

In a word, it is plain, from the inſtance in hand, that an acceptance of the goſpel is attended with joy. Theſe Jeruſalem-ſinners gladly received the word. In like manner do all who embrace it, which, as hinted, agrees with the nature of the goſpel-report, it being eſſentially good tidings of joy. Nor is evangelical ſorrow, which belongs to a broken and contrite heart, at all inconſiſtent with this. The mercy of God, conveyed through the blood of his Son, is adapted to both; for ſurely the man, who hath received remiſſion of ſins, may well bluſh and mourn on account of his vileneſs, and his having offended that Lord who hath pardoned him, and at the ſame time ſincerely and gladly rejoice in the grace he has received.

In this manner enlightened ſinners mix the word with faith, and obey the truth from the heart. They receive it as the word of God, in an inſtant, without heſitation, and with ardor and reſolution, as moſt deſirable in itſelf and important to them. They likewiſe

wiſe embrace it with a contrite frame, under a deep ſenſe of their own unworthineſs and the abounding grace, which they alſo admire; and further, it is attended with gladneſs, as it was with the Jews. Articles, which, I am perſuaded, will find a teſtimony in the conſcience of him, who has been called out of darkneſs into marvellous light. It is certain that the experience of the faithful differ much in degree; ſome are not ſo deeply ſenſible as others may have been; and I would be far from inſiſting on any thing not quite eſſential, and thereby ſtumble the weak; but it appears to me that theſe are genuine criterions. And I cannot but think that the leaſt of all ſaints will diſcern, on reflection, that the authority of God is at the foundation of his faith; that however long he may have been doubtful and held back, through ignorance and fear, from reſting his ſoul on Chriſt, the moment he ſaw his fulneſs and the mercy of God held forth unto him, he yielded to the ſceptre of his love; and that in ſo doing he humbled himſelf as unworthy the bleſſing, and admired the grace of his pardon; and, in a word, that at this ſeaſon he felt ſome degree of joy in believing. I appeal to the experienced Reader, and heartily wiſh theſe hints may prove an occaſion of his eſtabliſhment, that he may rejoice with them, in whom the word of the Lord abideth a ſeed of life everlaſting!

LECTURE

LECTURE XVI.

The ſource and ſymptoms of the pleaſure which attends a cordial acceptance of the goſpel. The duty of thoſe who embrace it to an immediate external obedience. And the joy of true faith compared with that which may be found with an hypocrite.

THE laſt lecture cloſed with obſerving that a ſaving reception of the goſpel is attended with joy. We now proceed to the ſpring of this ſacred affection peculiar to them that are called; which, together with the attending ſymptoms, the obligation on the ſubject to incorporate himſelf among the viſible diſciples of Jeſus, and a word for the relief of enquiring ſouls, will finiſh our deſign on the increaſe of the church by the firſt ſermon preached after our Lord's reſurrection. This enquiry is the more needful, ſince it appears from the parable of the ſower, Matt. xiii. that there is a joy felt by ſome who are void of ſpiritual underſtanding, and who have no root in themſelves, and therefore, however induced to a formal profeſſion, under which, for a ſeaſon, they may boaſt; they are at length offended, and periſh. Every conſiderate perſon would deprecate being deceived in a matter of ſo great importance. And it may be, my Reader is wiſhing to know that his joy is ſubſtantial and good. May this attempt to aſſiſt his enquiry be

ſucceeded,

ſucceeded, and prove a happy means of our mutual ſatisfaction and comfort! But let it be remembered that it is not eſſential to the character of a believer, that he has been enabled to diſtinguiſh the bottom of his heart, or that he ſhould view things in his own experience in the preciſe order laid down in the following obſervations. It is ſufficient, dear dear Friend, that thou findeſt in thyſelf the ſubſtance of what is deſcribed. This premiſed, I go on to the enquiry propoſed.

And here I cannot but apprehend, that the grand and original ſource of this divine joy is the glory of God, as it ſhines forth in Chriſt. This appears juſt, both from ſcripture and experience. That which is firſt preſented to the mind, by the light of the goſpel, to engage a man to the obedience of faith, may I think be properly conſidered as the leading ſpring of his joy in the Lord; and what is this but "the glory of God "in the face of his Son Jeſus Chriſt?" 2 Cor. iv. 6. In the ſame proſpect a believer perſeveres. "We all "with open face, as in a glaſs, behold the glory of "the Lord, &c." chap. iii. 18. The enlightened ſinner has a direct and true ſight of the moral excellency and beauty of the goſpel. It is a reconciled God, whoſe righteouſneſs is declared in the remiſſion of ſins, that fixes the heart and fills it with gladneſs. He that has been troubled for ſin as an offence againſt God, finds his reſt, on a view of the harmony of all divine attributes in his redemption; and it affords him unſpeakable ſatisfaction and delight, to behold the Almighty a juſt God and a Saviour, and that pardon and life

life everlaſting are ſet forth in a conſonance with the majeſty and glory of God and his government. Now this joy is more or leſs felt antecedent to and irreſpective of his own intereſt in this grace. So that the joy of a chriſtian is rooted in the love of God, whoſe glory is ſeen in his recovery from ruin. The word is received under a full perſuaſion of its conformity to the divine wiſdom and righteouſneſs; and though the joy of the awakened ſinner is not without ſome hope of perſonal intereſt in the Redeemer, or at leaſt of obtaining this ſalvation, yet the glory of the Lord, and the divine excellency of the things of the Spirit, is the firſt and immediate ſource of his gladneſs. Thus the joy of faith ariſeth from its object. It is God in Chriſt, who is the image of the Father, and in whom mercy and truth, and righteouſneſs and peace, unite and mutually embrace, that yields him delight. And accordingly the joy of believers hath always centered in God. Hence David ſtiles him, Pſalm xliii. 4. my exceeding joy; or, as it may be read, the joy of my gladneſs. He that is juſtified by faith "rejoices in "the Lord, and his ſoul is joyful in his God," Iſa. lxi. 10. And in Rom. v. 11. the apoſtle, ſpeaking of the general experience of the ſaints, ſaith, "We alſo "joy in God through our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, by "whom we have now received the atonement." The center of joy is its ſource. Joy naturally terminates in that out of which it originally aroſe. Now the joy of the chriſtian is in God reconciled by the death of his Son; the firſt ſpring of which was a proſpect of peace by the blood of his croſs. A chriſtian may not be able to diſtinguiſh this order of his affections in a life

life of faith; but, on examination, he will find in proportion to his light, that it takes its firſt riſe from a view of the glory of God in the perſon of Chriſt, and the diſplay there is in the goſpel, of the divine perfections in the deliverance and ſalvation of ſinners.

THE next ſource of gladneſs in receiving the word is the hope of the ſubject for himſelf. The called are begotten to a lively hope of perſonal intereſt in the ſalvation revealed; for the illuminations of the Spirit correſpond with the word of the goſpel, in which every ſenſible ſinner is invited with an aſſurance of mercy, as in the inſtance before us, ver. 38. Appropriation is eſſential to faith, inſomuch that however weak in its degree, there is no act of believing, properly ſpeaking, from the firſt motions of the quickened ſinner towards the Saviour without it. Believing is truſting; but there can be no truſting without hope. In receiving the word by faith, there is included an application to Chriſt, and of the peace he hath made; and conſequently the ſubject applies to himſelf the grace and glory which are the purchaſe of his blood. And accordingly, from the beginning, the goſpel is treaſured up or hid in the heart. He that receiveth the word of the kingdom receiveth it for himſelf, and layeth it up as his property, riches and life. Hence ſprings his joy; this God is his God; this Jeſus is his Saviour; and that he hath a right to claim in the promiſe of grace. At leaſt without ſome degree of hope there can be no joy; but gladneſs attends a receiving of the word, in proportion to the intereſt

and

and advantage the called apprehend themſelves to have in the glorious goſpel of Chriſt; and unſpeakable is his advantage; for, "of him are ye in Chriſt "Jeſus, who of God is made unto us wiſdom, and righ-"teouſneſs, and ſanctification and redemption," 1 Cor. i. 30. In this proſpect, may not the believer well exult, and, like the eunuch who was converted by the preaching of Philip, having put on Chriſt, proceed in his way rejoicing?

ANOTHER ſpring of this ſacred affection in the believer, is the happy difference which he finds and feels in himſelf. A ſtranger intermeddles not with this joy; nor is it in the power of a carnal mind to conceive the bleſſed alteration which a received goſpel makes in the ſoul. While a ſinner lies under conviction of guilt, ſelf-condemned and ready to periſh, his troubles are great, he is filled with darkneſs, and diſtreſs; and in ſome inſtances the tormenting fears of wrath have been exquiſitely great, like thoſe Jeruſalem-ſinners, whoſe hearts, we have ſeen, were pierced as with daggers or ſwords. Their caſe indeed was ſomewhat peculiar; but the evil of ſin in the conſcience will ever break the peace of the ſoul; and for the moſt part, the terrors of a broken law, and the apprehenſions of ruin, for a ſeaſon greatly diſturb the awakened tranſgreſſor. And with reſpect to thoſe who are ſeeking relief for their ſouls ſhort of Chriſt and his righteouſneſs, their minds are ſtill diſſatisfied: If they flatter themſelves awhile, ſome freſh excurſion of ſin, or defect in duty, plunges them into the ditch, and they are again in diſtreſs. But when God ſhines into the ſoul,

ſoul, and gives the light of his glory in Chriſt, O the liberty, peace and courage, that poſſeſſes the mind! This binds up the heart, comforts the mourner, and ſets the captive free. Now, juſtified by faith, the ſinner hath peace with God. He is ſollaced with divine love; and, being thus healed and reſtored, finds that reſt, which a faithful Saviour has promiſed to all who are weary and heavy laden, on coming to him, and feels himſelf chearful.

FINALLY. A certain proſpect of glory enhances the joy of the faithful. The ſalvation in Chriſt, which a believer apprehends, includes a glory to come, in the fruition of which he ſhall be happy for ever. Hence we are ſaid to be "called unto eternal glory," and "begotten by the reſurrection of Chriſt from the "dead, unto a lively hope of an inheritance incor-"ruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away." Chriſtians in this are conformed to their head, the Meſſiah, who in prophecy ſays, "Therefore my heart "is glad and my glory rejoiceth," Pſalm xvi. 9. And, whence this joy of the Redeemer? He adds, "Thou "wilt ſhew me the path of life." In like manner the believer is inſpired. A view of his glory with Chriſt fills him with gladneſs. Nor is this at all inconſiſtent with the believer's joy firſt ariſing from a ſight of the glory of God, and terminating in the Lord, ſince that glory in the hope of which he rejoices lies in his being with God, to behold his face in righteouſneſs, to be filled with his love, and to celebrate his praiſe. Such was the expectation of the Meſſiah himſelf, in the paſſage laſt mentioned:

mentioned: "In thy preſence is fulneſs of joy, and "at thy right hand are pleaſures for evermore."

THESE are the ſprings of gladneſs in the heart of him who receives the word, or believes in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. It takes its riſe from a view of the glory of God in him, the beauty of which attracts the beholder; for, however ſtrange or diſagreeable the goſpel may be to a natural man, nothing is more glorious in itſelf, or more ſuited to the taſte and deſire of him that is ſpiritual. He rejoices in the divine wiſdom, holineſs and righteouſneſs, which ſhine in his juſtification, through faith in the Redeemer. Thus the goſpel is firſt received as it is in itſelf, glorious and excellent. And though this is not without hope of an intereſt in the ſalvation revealed, yet a diſcovery of the divine glory in this proviſion of grace firſt ſtrikes the mind of him that is called, whoſe pleaſure increaſes on a view of his perſonal advantage, which together with the ſweet alteration the peace of God makes in his heart, lately troubled with ſin, and the proſpect of life everlaſting fills him with joy. Now all theſe are more or leſs experienced by the faithful. No wonder, then, that the word is gladly received. Can the man be otherwiſe than glad, who beholds the glory of God diſplayed in the ſalvation of his ſoul? Or ſhall he who is relieved from the ſorrows of a wounded conſcience, and the terrors of divine wrath, being cleanſed with the blood of Chriſt, who is now formed in him the hope of glory, fail of rejoicing? Certainly no. May this joy in the ſalvation of God, my dear Friend, be the ſtrength of our heart, that, perſevering

in

in the fruits of holineſs, we may attain to perfection in the world to come!

Now whoever has found this joy ariſe in his heart, to him the word of the goſpel is precious; he eſteems it as excellent in itſelf, and as the means of his own ſalvation. It is therefore more than his neceſſary food, Job xxiii. 12. more to be deſired than gold, yea than much fine gold; ſweeter alſo than honey or the honey-comb, Pſalm xix. 10. Hence young converts give themſelves to reading and meditation, and delight in the company of thoſe who are ready to diſcourſe on ſpiritual ſubjects. They alſo take every opportunity of hearing, to be deprived of which would be as a famine to their ſouls. This delight in the law of God is frequently ſeen to abate, yea and, it may be, that very ſoon, which is juſtly lamented; and they who have forgot the love of their eſpouſals, do well to look back to the kindneſs of their youth, and remember how they firſt received and heard, and hold faſt and repent, Rev. iii. 3. But if any man deſpiſes the word of the Lord, or thinks its miniſtration needleſs for him, under a conceit of what he hath already attained, he is proud, knowing nothing, and hath need to beware that he deceives not himſelf among thoſe who receive not the love of the truth; for where that abides in the heart, the preaching of the goſpel is highly eſteemed, and the preachers in conſequence, which is another ſymptom of gladly receiving the word, as it is written, "How "beautiful are the feet of them that preach the goſ-"pel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" Rom. x. 15. Faithful miniſters of Chriſt are hated and

and deſpiſed by the enemies of the truth; but it is the property of thoſe who believe to eſteem them. And however they are treated by ſome who pretend to this faith, it is certain that they are highly acceptable to them in whom it prevails. And this is perfectly natural, ſince beſides the pleaſure and advantage they themſelves find in hearing, it is a genuine, and indeed one of the firſt and moſt ſenſible ſymptoms of embracing the goſpel, to wiſh it might be the power of God to the ſalvation of others. The ſame diſpoſition is ſeen in every one in whom God has ſhined, which diſcovered itſelf in the woman of Samaria; having found Chriſt, and been enabled to truſt him, he would rejoice at his being revealed to all with whom he is connected, that they might alſo believe. In a word, under the influence of this divine joy, believers are bold to confeſs the Lord Jeſus, and to declare their experience of his love. This joy is as the light of the morning, which diſperſeth the clouds; the fears which overſhadow and intimidate the mind through ignorance, unbelief and carnal reaſon, vaniſh before it, and a freedom and courage poſſeſſes the ſubject, who no longer will conſult fleſh and blood, but reſolves to obſerve every goſpel-inſtitution. Thus no ſooner did theſe diſciples embrace the goſpel, but they openly and joyfully joined to the Lord, though it called for the immediate and certain expence of all that they had, and was even at the hazard of their lives.

THIS leads to the reaſons for an immediate and chearful compliance with the appointments of the Redeemer. Obedience to Chriſt is of infinite importance.

There is ſalvation in no other; nor any other way of being ſaved by Jeſus but through faith in him. We hope that many who are not in a profeſſed ſubjection to his goſpel, yet believe on his name. But how uncomely in a chriſtian not to be conformed to the undoubted will of his Lord? Indeed this is ſo againſt the natural tendency of faith, and the genuine influence of divine love, in the remiſſion of ſins, that one would be apt to conclude that the ſubject could not allow himſelf, on any conſideration whatever, to fall ſhort of the leaſt command of his Saviour; yet, alas, we have reaſon to lament, that, in all appearance, many who have taſted that the Lord is gracious, through one unhappy occaſion and another, preſume to live in the omiſſion of what is enjoined them! And, Reader, art thou in this way? Allow me to preſs thee; examine thyſelf, and obey thy Redeemer in all things; remember what Peter declares, "This ſame Jeſus God hath "made both Lord and Chriſt." It is not the forgetful hearer of the word, but the doer of the work: "This "man, ſays the apoſtle, ſhall be bleſſed in his deed." Faith without fruit will as ſurely deceive thee as an heartleſs obedience: A general ſlight of that open confeſſion of Chriſt before men, among thoſe who ſit under the word, may render thee indifferent about it; but it will be found a thing of the greateſt importance when the Son of man ſhall confeſs his faithful diſciples before the angels of God. And it ſhould further be noted, that a perſonal ſubjection to Jeſus is, by the teſtimony of God, eſſential to the character of him that may hope for the ſalvation revealed in the goſpel.

IT is a glorious truth, that the goſpel is the "power "of God unto ſalvation to every one that believeth:" But then we are to remember that chriſtian baptiſm, and a conformity to the order of the goſpel, belongs to the obedience of faith, which indeed comprehends more, but not leſs, than a regard to every external act of homage to the Saviour. From this, and many other conſiderations *, the folly of neglecting divine appointments is manifeſt. An attempt to convince men of this may now ſeem abortive and vain; but certainly he who in the end is found to have deſpiſed, or ſhuned the Redeemer's commands, will have no reaſon to glory at his appearance and kingdom. The man whoſe conſcience tells him that he has wilfully omitted and lived in a neglect of any known inſtitution of Jeſus, will find his heart fail him at the approach of his judge; but he that abides in Chriſt may have confidence, for he ſhall not be aſhamed before him at his coming.

As a further inducement to be found in the way of obedience, I intreat the Reader, who truſts in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, will allow me to urge the following particulars upon him:

1. THOU art certainly qualified for this goſpel-ſervice. Is the queſtion whether thy years, condition in life, or attainment in knowledge, faith and love, come up to what is required in the diſciples of Chriſt? The anſwer is at hand: "If thou believeſt with all thine "heart, thou mayeſt," Acts viii. 37. A meetneſs for

* Folly of neglecting divine inſtitutions, publiſhed 1758.

theſe holy appointments depends not on any particular age or worldly circumſtances, no nor on ſingular advances in a ſtate of grace. All that they require, is a new heart, and manifeſt repentance and faith, without which no man can be ſaved. And if thou art qualified through grace, muſt not thy conſcience condemn thee for omitting thy Redeemer's commands?

2. It is abſolutely required at thy hands. "Repent and be baptized," is the voice of Chriſt in his goſpel to the end of the world. No man that truſts in the Lord is on any account excepted from an obligation to confeſs him. All and every one, who looks to Jeſus for life, is enjoined in his word to be baptized in his name, and wilt thou withſtand the united demand of his authority and love?

Moreover, the example of the faithful call for thine obedience. It was the univerſal practice of the primitive diſciples. Of the multitude converted in the apoſtles time, not one appears to delay this profeſſion, Saul only excepted, and he ſtands juſtly reproved. It becomes thee to imitate their zeal. We are to follow them in the path of duty as well as of ſuffering. And indeed no kind of ſufferings endured otherwiſe than under this profeſſion, hath a direct tendency to glorify Chriſt, or to prove our faith in him. But, we have ſeen that when the goſpel firſt prevailed, converts were manifeſt by their immediate recourſe to the miniſters of Chriſt, they willingly offered themſelves for baptiſm, and to be joined with the church, and did not, as many now do, linger and halt year after year, as

if

if a profeſſion of Jeſus was a matter of indifferency or preſumption, but they made haſte and delayed not, and and in all appearance thought a day loſt not ſpent under Chriſt, and this they did in the midſt of temptations and fiery trials. Now, if it became them thus, at the hazard of every thing dear in this world, to put on Chriſt, ſhall any in the preſent day, who in the general, run no ſuch danger to the fleſh, with decency neglect it? But, alas, the ſcepticiſm and lukewarmneſs that abounds, more effectually and fatally quenches our zeal for the ordinances of the Lord, than the ſevereſt perſecutions for conſcience ſake. This the experience of all ages hath too plainly verified; which ſhews the perverſeneſs of our natural ſpirits, and may juſtly fill us with bluſhing, while we bleſs God for the external peace and liberty we enjoy. But again,

4. It is thy honor and advantage to be under this holy profeſſion. However deſpiſed by the world, can any thing be more truly praiſe-worthy than to be a diſciple of Jeſus? If relative honor in any character is in proportion to the dignity of him with whom we are connected, as moſt certainly it is, who can vie with the chriſtian, or what more honorable than his profeſſion? To be a real and viſible diſciple of the Son of God, and a follower of the Lamb, who is exalted in the midſt of the throne in the heavens, far above all, muſt be an honor indeed, infinitely ſurpaſſing the moſt noble alliance or connexion on earth. It is for want of diſcerning the glory of Cnriſt, that any are backward to give the moſt evident proof of their ſubjection to his authority. A due ſenſe of this in the heart will

make a man count it an honor to be vile in the eyes of the world for his name's ſake. No man need be aſhamed of the goſpel of Chriſt who is not a ſhame to it, but adorns the doctrine of his Saviour. And further,

5. To be baptized into Chriſt is as it were to have his Father's name written in our foreheads, Rev. xiv. 1. for we are all the children of God by faith in Chriſt Jeſus, the honor of which is not to be expreſſed. Nor is it leſs an advantage to be walking in Chriſt. This right or privilege is profitable to him that believes, and therefore to be highly eſteemed. If we may credit the ſcripture of truth, and the declared experience of the faithful, there is a reward in walking blameleſs in the ordinances of the Lord; it is ſo in point of knowledge, protection, comfort and joy, in communion with God and his people; all which muſt be exceeding precious to him that is ſpiritual. And are not theſe motives ſufficient to engage thy chearful ſubmiſſion to Jeſus? If any thing further is needful to convince thee, conſider,

6. On the contrary, the many diſadvantages that attend a non-conformity to the evident and undeniable appointments of the Redeemer. In this ſtate, as hinted already, the ſubject can yield no ſufficient proof of his faith. A man may believe; but no man can ſhew that he believes in a neglect of the Saviour's inſtitutions, which are grounded in his authority, and a teſt of the ſoul's obedience unto him. By this omiſſion alſo a perſon falls ſhort of the character of him unto whom the

the promiſe of ſalvation is given, which, one would think, ſhould alarm the man who deſires to be ſaved. And further, he that lives out of this order excludes himſelf from other precious promiſes, and is not in the ordinary way of communion with God, and conſequently it affects his peace, holineſs, joy and love, all which are greatly promoted in this divine fellowſhip. In a word, he is much expoſed in an hour of temptation. One ſpecious excuſe which ſome make for ſhunning a chriſtian profeſſion is this, that they are afraid they ſhall prove a diſhonor unto it. But, not to inſiſt on the power of Chriſt to keep his faithful diſciples from falling, which is hereby overlooked, the objection ſuppoſes that a perſon is obliged by this holy order to walk with greater circumſpection than him who is not under the ſame; but, is this an argument with one that fears God to juſtify a neglect of his precepts? Shall the man who follows after holineſs, deprive himſelf of this ſacred guard by refuſing to comply with the plain inſtitutions of his Lord? Or, ſhall he not readily come under every poſſible obligation againſt ſin? Reaſons for a believer being baptized and added to the church might eaſily be multiplied, but theſe may ſuffice: He is qualified; it is required at his hands: This was the univerſal practice of thoſe who were called from the beginning; and the honor and advantage of walking under this profeſſion is great and unſpeakable. On the other hand, no leſs are the diſadvantages of not being conformed to this order. If theſe prevail not with the Reader to to be found in this duty, what hope can I have of ſucceeding? I muſt leave him to the mercies

of the Lord, whoſe people ſhall be willing in the day of his power.

BUT perhaps the Reader is doubting his ſtate, and ready to ſay: True; I cannot but own that the word of the Lord has come with ſome power into my heart. My affections have ſometimes been raiſed, and I have felt a joy in hearing the goſpel; but, alas, I am ſtill ſo carnal and ſenſual, and find ſo little of the love of God in my ſoul, that I fear my tranſitory delight is no other than may be found with an hypocrite. This may alſo be the fear of one who has already made a profeſſion, in conſequence of which he is ſometimes filled with diſtreſs.

To relieve the enquiring ſoul, I ſhall cloſe this lecture with a criterion or two, by which we may diſtinguiſh between the joy of the hypocrite, and that of a true believer.

AND from what has been ſaid, it appears that the hypocrite's joy is in himſelf; whereas we have ſeen, that the firſt ſpring of joy in him that receiveth the word is in God. The joy of the hypocrite primarily ariſeth from a confident and high conceit of his good ſtate, without any reaſon from ſcripture, but purely from his own imagination. He is unacquainted with ſorrow for ſin, and not duly affected with the wiſdom and righteouſneſs of God in our redemption by the blood of his Son. He is taken up in ſelf-admiration, and continually boaſting of his great experience, and how religious he is. Not ſo the man in whom the word

word is effectual unto the obedience of faith. The love of God is at the bottom of that man's profeſſion, which is in proportion to the abundance of grace he has received in the remiſſion of ſins. And as the nature of ſin is more his averſion, than the puniſhment thereof; ſo, as hath been ſhewn, he delights firſt and chiefly in the glory of God, the excellency of Chriſt and his goſpel, while he rejoices in the ſaving advantage he obtains from this proviſion of infinite wiſdom and love. Again,

HENCE the joy of a falſe profeſſor is attended with ſelf-exaltation, and renders him light and preſumptuous; he is proud of his attainments; and while he thinks that he ſtands, the man whoſe foot is ready to ſlip, is as a lamp deſpiſed in his ſight; thus he is haughty, careleſs of his own conduct, cenſorious of others. On the contrary, the chriſtian's joy, which proceeds from a view of the righteouſneſs of God in the pardon of his ſins; the evil and bitterneſs of which he hath felt in his conſcience, is attended with humility, reverence, and an holy concern for the honor of God. His joy is mingled in his heart with evangelical ſorrow. He is low in his own eyes; has compaſſion for them that are out of the way, is ſober in his account of himſelf, and in this ſtate of ſin and temptation rejoiceth with trembling.

AND further, in the midſt of all his vain glory the hypocrite is barren. "But (ſaith our Lord) he "that receiveth ſeed into the good ground, is he that "heareth the word and underſtandeth it, which alſo

"beareth

"bearеth fruit," Matt. xiii. 23. He that rejoiceth in his own attainment is an empty vine, and brings forth fruit unto himſelf. But the chriſtian's joy, which ſprings from the love of God, naturally yieldeth fruit unto him, as it is written, "But now being "made free from ſin, and become the ſervants of "God, ye have your fruit unto holineſs, and the end "everlaſting life," Rom. vi. 22. which leads to another criterion, and the laſt I ſhall mention, which is this:

THE joy of the hypocrite is tranſitory, whereas that of the chriſtian abides. I mean in reſpect of its principle and habit in the ſoul, for his frame is liable to change. Nothing is more uncertain and fleeting than his joy who has no root in himſelf. The man, whoſe profeſſion is not grounded in the love of God, will ſurely be offended. But he that has received the goſpel into his heart by faith, though in heavineſs for a ſeaſon through manifold temptations, has an unfailing ſource of joy in the immutable counſel and favor of the Almighty, and may always rejoice in the Lord. In a view of the glory and importance of the divine word, and his own intereſt in the bleſſings of grace, he ſhall not be moved, but will hold out to the end and be ſaved. "The water (ſays our Lord) "that I ſhall give him, ſhall be in him a well of "water ſpringing up into eternal life," John vi. 14. This is the joy of faith; it centers in God; it makes a man humble and fruitful; and it abides in the ſoul. But carnal rejoicing, though occaſioned by the word, ariſeth from ſome other conſideration than divine

vine grace and righteouſneſs, and terminates in ſelf; it puffs up the ſubject, who is unfruitful, and will fail in an hour of trial. Dear Reader, examine thyſelf; "for who is wiſe and he ſhall underſtand "theſe things? prudent, and he ſhall know them? "For the ways of the Lord are right, and the juſt "ſhall walk in them, but the tranſgreſſors ſhall "fall therein." Having this teſtimony that thy joy is in the Lord, fear not, though now thou mayeſt have ſorrow, thine heart ſhall rejoice, and thy joy no man taketh from thee; for "light is ſown for the "righteous, and gladneſs for the upright in heart."

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.

BOOK III.

BEING

An Hiſtory of the Church in her infant State.

LECTURE XVII.

The conſtancy and faithfulneſs of the firſt diſciples in their communion together, under a profeſſion of chriſtianity.

OF all hiſtories that of the ſcripture juſtly claims the pre-eminence. Its undoubted veracity, with the importance of its various and wonderful events, and eſpecially when joined to the noble and gracious deſign of its glorious Author, which is to promote the honor of God, and the ſalvation and happineſs of man, challenge our higheſt regard *.

SCRIP-

* Properly ſpeaking, the Author of ſcripture is God, and particularly the Holy Ghoſt, by whoſe inſpiration the propheſies were ſpoken, and under whoſe infallible direction both the hiſtory and prophecy of thoſe ſacred writings were penned, and committed to the church. This, no doubt, is the prevailing ſentiment, notwithſtanding it is ſo much the cuſtom to give this character to the apoſtles and others, who were the emanuenſis of the divine Spirit, or writers rather than authors of the books and epiſtles to which their names are affixed.

SCRIPTURE may be conſidered as an univerſal hiſtory of the world, and the church, but eſpecially of the latter, in which the doctrines, precepts and ordinances of God, and the practice of men are faithfully recited. Thus the Old-Teſtament is the beſt hiſtory of the world from its creation, including the fall of man, the counſel of God relating to the recovery of his choſen by the ſeed of the woman; alſo the methods of divine providence in raiſing and preſerving a godly ſeed, amidſt the corruption and deſolations of mankind, till the Meſſiah came. It is therefore likewiſe a hiſtory of the church, which is carried on in the New-Teſtament, beginning, in the four evangeliſts, with the incarnation of the Son of God, whoſe life, miniſtry, ſufferings, death, and reſurrection from the dead, are conciſely, but fully ſet forth, and with this view, "that ye might believe that Jeſus is the Chriſt "the Son of God, and that believing ye might have "life through his name," John xx. 31.

THE ſame deſign is purſued in the remaining part of the ſcripture to the end. Now of this divine narration no part is of greater importance to the church than the Acts of the Apoſtles, which contain an authentic account of the riſe and progreſs of chriſtianity in the world; ſo that theſe writings, with the addition of the epiſtles, and the book of Revelation, which cloſes the ſacred canon, alone afford a genuine and compleat hiſtory of the purity in doctrine, worſhip and diſcipline, which prevailed among the firſt chriſtians, who are the faireſt example of ſocial religion.

THIS

THIS then is the true eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, to which all others wrote after the days of the apoſtles muſt be ſubordinate, and an acquaintance with which is to be eſteemed one branch of a chriſtian's attainment, as a conformity unto it is a part of his character. And it were heartily to be wiſhed, that every one, who profeſſeth himſelf a follower of the Lamb, made it his diligent ſtudy. In all probability we ſhould then be more united in faith and worſhip, and animated to a more holy, ſpiritual and orderly temper and conduct, and alſo love one another more than at preſent in all appearance we do. I ſhall therefore count it a mercy if this little ſketch ſhould be an occaſion of promoting the knowledge of ſo uſeful a part of divine revelation, or a means of reviving the true ſpirit of primitive godlineſs.

THE paragraph on which I have planned my deſign is contained in the laſt ſix verſes of the ſecond of the Acts, which run in the following words:

"AND they continued ſtedfaſtly in the apoſtles "doctrine and fellowſhip, and in breaking of bread, "and in prayers. And fear came upon every ſoul, "and many wonders and ſigns were done by the "apoſtles. And all that believed were together, and "had all things common. And ſold their poſſeſſions "and goods, and parted them to all men, as every "man had need. And they continuing daily with "one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from "houſe

" houſe to houſe, did eat their meet with gladneſs " and ſingleneſs of heart, praiſing God, and having " favor with all the people. And the Lord added " to the church daily ſuch as ſhould be ſaved."

HERE then is a conciſe hiſtory of the primitive church in her pure infant ſtate, before her members were ſcattered by perſecution, or thoſe errors, diviſions and apoſtaſies took place, which hath ſince diſgraced and defiled her. Indeed ſhe was not yet arrived to maturity, in reſpect of that order the infinite wiſdom of her Lord ſoon after ſaw fit to eſtabliſh for her edification. At preſent the apoſtles ſupplied the part of biſhops and deacons, officers who are ſince become needful to a perfect church-ſtate. We view her as a lovely child, in her firſt appearance in the world. There are alſo ſome circumſtances peculiar to her then preſent condition, a pretended conformity to which would be ridiculous or worſe, yet ſhe is the original pattern of piety and love. Theſe are the lively features of a neat goſpel-church, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghoſt; and however ſome may plead for another manner, the ſame ſpirit and behaviour will be found when and where genuine chriſtianity prevails, for religion is ſubſtantially the ſame in all ages and places to the end of the world.

THE account divides itſelf naturally into three general branches.

I. THE

I. THE conſtancy and faithfulneſs of the primitive diſciples in communion together, under a profeſſion of the goſpel.

II. THEIR manner of life. And,

III. THEIR daily increaſe.

THE enſuing part of the lecture will contain a review of the firſt of theſe articles. We are told that they *continued ſtedfaſtly*; and the particular inſtances are given in which they perſevered with ſo great reſolution and zeal.

IT is ſaid that they *continued*. Some nominal chriſtians, like ſeed ſown in ſtony ground, hear the word, and receive it with a kind of joy; but, having no root in themſelves, their religion is ſoon at an end. Indeed, fluſhed with a conceit of their knowledge, they preſume they belong to the kingdom of God, and haſtily ſpring up in a promiſing blade of external obedience, in which they are zealous awhile, but alas they abide not; their goodneſs is as the morning-cloud, and as the early dew it paſſeth away; thus tranſient is their form of chriſtianity. Here and there one who ſets out with a ſhew, ſoon ſtumble and recover, or falling, riſe up again; but from the parable of the ſower, and from general experience, it appears that few are reſtored, whoſe ſhining profeſſion preſently iſſues in a ſhameful departure from God.

For

For the moſt part they ſeem given up to the deluſions of ſatan, and being hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin, become final apoſtates; ſo that however in ſome inſtances ſuch may have grace to repent, for their caſe is not deſperate, we have reaſon to tremble for them who quickly throw off the name of Chriſt, and return to their ſins, as in the higheſt danger of ruin. Not ſo theſe diſciples; they continued in the ways of the Lord, and proved the ſincerity of their love. Again,

THEY continued *ſtedfaſtly*. If ſome ſoon apoſtatize, many more, who begin with a flaming zeal, are quickly lukewarm, looſe and diſorderly, under the profeſſion they hold. Hence they become inactive and barren; and, in their ſpirit and behaviour, fall ſhort of the character they bear. A man may preſently take up the name of a chriſtian, with whom it may not be eaſy to drop it, in a country the inhabitants of which are conſidered as chriſtians, except thoſe who expreſly and openly deny the very name, as Turks, Jews and Deiſts, to which boldneſs but few comparatively attain. It is difficult to throw off the garb of religion; and rarely ſeen that he who hath put himſelf under a form of chriſtianity, and joined to any particular church, is fond of yielding up his character, though alas he may be far from aiming at a converſation becoming the goſpel of Chriſt, but in many reſpects behave unworthy his heavenly calling, inſomuch that it may be ſcarcely tollerable for him to be continued in the communion of ſaints. But the diſciples at Jeruſalem not only made a profeſſion,

but *continued ſtedfaſtly* therein: προσκαρτερουντες one word in the original, and very emphatical, which carries in it an invincible conſtancy, alluding to hunters who ceaſe not to follow till they have got their purſuit: it ſignifies not barely perſeverance, but to perſevere with ſtrength, ſo as to increaſe in their attendance, zeal and courage in the ways of the Lord. Thus, inſtead of declining and becoming lukewarm, theſe primitive chriſtians waxed bolder and ſtronger, and exerted themſelves ſtill more and more: for the expreſſion here uſed, regards not only the time, but alſo the temper, with which they adhered to their profeſſion, and points out their importuni y and deſire in this perſeverance: So the word is uſed, Rom. xii. 12. *continuing inſtant* in prayer; where it reſpects not barely the *time* of praying, but likewiſe and chiefly, the *fervent manner* in which it becomes us to wreſtle with God. Thus theſe diſciples continued; they applied themſelves with earneſtneſs to every branch and duty of their profeſſion, and held faſt the ſame without wavering; being patient, watchful and active, they preſſed forward, and made daily advances towards a perfection in the things which pertained to the kingdom of God. How noble the example! and what a reflection on them who are unfruitful and fickle, and who, being led away with the wicked, fall from their own ſtedfaſtneſs! But bleſſed and honorable are thoſe who cleave to the Lord with purpoſe of heart.

THE particulars in which theſe chriſtians perſevered in ſo laudable a manner are recited as follows:

FIRST,

FIRST, In the *apoſtles doctrine*, i. e. the doctrines they taught, which were truly the doctrines of Chriſt, and not of the apoſtles invention. The goſpel is not the word of man, but of God. The apoſtles were only miniſters of Chriſt, and ſpake the wholſom words of Jeſus their Lord, nevertheleſs it is ſtiled the apoſtles doctrine; as Paul, who aſſumed nothing to himſelf, but was ever deeply affected with his unworthyneſs to preach it, calls it his goſpel, becauſe the miniſtration thereof was committed to him: And it may alſo be ſtiled their doctrine in oppoſition to the falſe notions ſpread abroad by ſome who perverted the goſpel of Chriſt. Doctrine here is no other than the faith once delivered to the ſaints, under which all the precious truths of the glorious goſpel are included; in general it was Jeſus and the reſurrection; a new and ſtrange doctrine to the world, yet it was no other than Moſes and the prophets did ſay ſhould come, Acts xvii. 19. and chap. xxvi. 22. compared. The ſubſtance of this goſpel was publiſhed of old, though, not being mixed with faith in many that heard, it did not profit or ſave them, and they periſhed in their ſins; which awful account is to warn us that we receive not the grace of God in vain. Since the coming of Chriſt, this grace has been more fully manifeſted by his own preaching, and that of his inſpired apoſtles, whoſe doctrine included every thing revealed concerning the eternal purpoſe of the Father, and the covenant of redemption, wherein is laid out the methods of divine wiſdom and love in the ſalvation of the choſen, through faith in Chriſt Jeſus: So that the apoſtles doctrine takes

in whatever relates to the Redeemer's perſon, mediatorial character, ſacrifice, righteouſneſs, grace, and obedience of faith, which includes the office of the Spirit, and in a word the whole counſel of God. Many errors were ſoon introduced, as hinted already, by which not a few were deceived and corrupted; but the apoſtles adhered to the truth, and united in their report without variation. Their doctrine was ſimple and pure; it was not divers, as among the falſe teachers, not yea and nay, but uniform, conſiſtent and one; which may be another reaſon for its being thus ſtiled: They one and all preached the ſame goſpel in every place. Now it is declared that the primitive chriſtians continued ſtedfaſtly in this apoſtolic doctrine: And this denotes in the firſt place, their open and bold profeſſion of the ſame. When ſound doctrine falls into diſgrace, and becomes oppoſed and deſpiſed, many are unwilling to own it, and are tempted to hide their conviction of its reality and importance; but theſe diſciples were not aſhamed of the goſpel of Chriſt, it had been the power of God to their ſalvation; they therefore held faſt this profeſſion of their faith without wavering, and perſevered in their witneſs to the truth. Again, it may intend their diligence in hearing this doctrine, which indeed ſtands connected with the former. Hearing the word is not only the means of increaſing in ſpiritual knowledge, but alſo one manner of teſtifying a regard for the goſpel: So that the man who neglects it, not only betrays a conceit of himſelf, but hereby, in ſome meaſure, drops his profeſſion. Not ſo thoſe diſciples, they continued with conſtancy under the preaching of the word, as became them who would attain to all

riches

riches of the full aſſurance of underſtanding, to the acknowledgment of the myſtery of God, and of the Father, and of Chriſt, that they might be built up and eſtabliſhed in the faith, as they had been taught; by which example they condemn all thoſe who are indifferent about hearing the word of the Lord, and are not ſtudious to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Chriſt: If ſuch have the love of God in them, they are not likely to be ſtedfaſt or fruitful in their profeſſion, but rather to be carried about with every wind of falſe doctrine, and vain imagination of them who lay in wait to deceive; ſuch are in very great danger of falling, and have need to beware. Thus they continued ſtedfaſtly, i. e. ſwerved not from their profeſſion of the truth, or attendance on the miniſtration of it, but confeſſed and purſued after a further eſtabliſhment in the doctrine they had been taught by the apoſtles, not giving place to the hereſies that abounded in oppoſition to the goſpel of Chriſt, or abating in their zeal for its honor and ſucceſs.

From this article I would note one thing by the way, that demands our attention, which is this, namely, that it is part of the chriſtian character to maintain a conſcientious regard, and ſtrictly adhere to ſound doctrine. They who would leſſen the concern of the faithful about purity in doctrine, depart from the original pattern, and ſtrike at the foundation of real chriſtianity. To be ſound in faith in this ſenſe, is of the utmoſt importance; for truth is the ſtandard of experience, and the ſole rule of practice; and without knowledge neither the heart nor the life can be good;

it is the true grace of God or true doctrine of the goſpel, wherein believers ſtand, and become fruitful, 1 Pet. v. 12. And accordingly it is written, Col. i. 6. that the goſpel which came unto the Coloſſians, as it did in all the world, bringing forth fruit, as, ſaith he, "it doth alſo in you, ſince the day ye heard of "it, and knew the grace of God in truth," i. e. the true grace of God or doctrine of Chriſt, in the experience and power of them through faith. Errors in doctrine lead to errors in practice. Hence, though a mere ſpeculative knowledge of the goſpel has no ſaving or abiding effect, yet it is needful to guard againſt any corruption from the ſimplicity that is in Chriſt; and therefore Paul and Barnabas, Acts xiii. 43. ſpeaking unto the people at Antioch, "perſuaded them to "continue in the grace of God," i. e. the word of God, which they had been preaching unto them. It is therefore becoming the chriſtian character to buy the truth and ſell it not, but, after the example of theſe diſciples, to be ſtedfaſt in the doctrine of the Lord preached by his apoſtle, and on no conſideration whatever, in any degree, depart from them. But to return.

ANOTHER inſtance in which theſe primitive chriſtians perſevered, is *fellowſhip*. By fellowſhip we ſometimes underſtand an union with the ſaints, or place in their ſociety, which was our ſubject in a preceeding lecture; and I confeſs that the ſame word is uſed in Gal. ii. 9. for the right hand of fellowſhip, given by Cephas and others to Paul and Barnabas, in token of their hearty acknowledgment of them in

in the character of fellow-communicants. We have alſo ſhewn that it is the duty of every believer to be found in the communion of ſaints, which ſome neglect, who, while they boaſt in their knowledge of doctrines, have not learned to obſerve this noble divine inſtitution. But we have already ſeen theſe diſciples added to the church. They were joined together in the Lord previous to this; ſo that their continuing ſtedfaſtly in this fellowſhip muſt refer to ſome particular branch of duty therein, diſtinct from other articles mentioned; and I apprehend it more eſpecially regards their forwardneſs to communicate *. In the ſociety or fellowſhip of the church there is a communication of all goodneſs from one to another, according

* Κοινωνία, an obligation to this free and faithful communication of all our talents perſonal and relative, which may conduce to the advantage of the body and its members, reſults from the nature of that covenant chriſtians are under in a church ſtate, which hath reſpect not only to the Lord as our common head, and to all his appointments and officers in his houſe; but it alſo has a mutual reſpect to every one in communion, for in this confederation the diſciples clave together, ſo as to be no longer their own, but the property one of another. The ſcriptures are plain, 2 Cor. viii. 5. "They gave themſelves to us by the will of God." Again, Rom. xv. 7. "Receive ye one another." And further, 1 Pet. v. 5. "Yea all of you be ſubject one to another." See alſo Col. iv. 9—12. 1 Cor. xii. 12—27. Rom. xii. 5. Col. ii. 19. and Eph. 20, 21. So then in church-covenant, by the will of God, his people give themſelves each to the other, and are as it were the property one of the other. A ſelfiſh ſelf-willed ſpirit is directly againſt the principles of this ſacred union in the Lord. And if chriſtians united with underſtanding, according to the goſpel of Chriſt, and were faithful to their ſolemn engagements, they would abound, to their power, in all liberality and good order, which would turn to their mutual comfort and edification. But there is reaſon to fear that many profeſſors are ignorant of the foundation of this holy compact by divine appointment, and therefore without remorſe walk after their own imagination.

cording to the ability which God giveth, in things natural and ſpiritual. With reſpect to outward good things, we ſhall find in this infant church an univerſal community of their ſubſtance for the benefit of the whole; a circumſtance peculiar to the then ſtate of chriſtianity in the world, as I ſhall endeavour to ſhew in its place. If this is at all referred to here, it may intend their continuing from time to time, as additions were made of new converts, or any others who might have property come into their hands, to throw it into the common ſtock, as at the beginning. However a free contribution of temporal good, for the ſupport of the miniſtry, ſupply of the poor, and other neceſſary expences for maintaining the worſhip of God in the communion of his ſaints, is an eſſential branch of chriſtian fellowſhip in the preſent ſtate of the church, and will be ſo to the end of the world, unto which, exhortations abound in the New-Teſtament, which ſome regard not, being ſadly deficient in their duty to the Lord and his people. But many are of another and a better ſpirit, or the viſible intereſt of Chriſt would ſink in the world, which, bleſſed be God, who has the hearts of men in his hands, ſhall never come to paſs. But this is not to be reſtrained to liberality, it extends to other inſtances of brotherly love, and takes in ſpiritual communications, ſuch as admonitions, advice, yea and viſiting the ſick, or thoſe who are in diſtreſs; for however thoughtleſs, or little exerciſed, ſome may be in the laſt mentioned office of love, to the grief of their afflicted brethren, it is a conſiderable branch of practical godlineſs and chriſtian communion, and they who neglect it do well

to

to conſider what the apoſtle James declares, chap. i. ulto. " Pure religion and undefiled before God and " the Father is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and the widow " in their affliction." In ſhort, when it is ſaid they continued ſtedfaſtly in fellowſhip, it carries in it their conſtancy and diligence in every act of endeared friendſhip, and mutual and earneſt endeavour by love to ſerve one another, as they had opportunity, and as occaſion required. Thus theſe primitive chriſtians abounded in every ſocial virtue, each one ſtriving to his utmoſt for the comfort and edification of the church, and the members in particular; ſo that their religion did not reſt in purity of doctrine, but, like thoſe who have an experience of its power, and the love of God in their hearts, they were fruitful in every good word and work.

THE next article, by which their continuing ſtedfaſtly under their profeſſion is ſpecified, is that of *breaking of bread.* A phraſe which, however ſometimes uſed for common and natural meals, as I apprehend in verſe 46, yet here, I think, it plainly intends that ſpiritual repaſt, or divine ordinance in the church, the Lord's-ſupper. On this table of the Lord, are placed by his direction, bread and wine, which are appointed ſigns or figures of his body and blood, the conſtituent parts of that fleſh in which he ſuffered, when he became a ſacrifice for the ſins of his people. One end of this ſupper being a commemoration of our Saviour's paſſion on the croſs, as ſpecified by himſelf, when he inſtituted the ſame, and accordingly it is ſaid, that " in eating this bread, and

" in

" in drinking this cup, ye do ſhew forth the Lord's " death till he come," 1 Cor. xi. 26. But there is another ſign of uſe in this ordinance. We are taught chap. x. 17. of the ſame epiſtle, which is this, namely, that hereby we teſtify our union with Chriſt, and with one another in him: " For (ſaith the apoſtle) " we being many are ONE BREAD *, and one body; " for

* Dr. Dodderidge notes that many valuable manuſcripts read, " and of " one cup." And we find in the preceeding verſe, and indeed in all other places in ſcripture, the cup in the ſupper is mentioned in the ſingular number, which anſwers to the idea our Saviour himſelf gives us of his bloody ſufferings, repreſented by the cup in the ſacrament. When in an agony in the garden he ſupplicates his Father, he ſays not, Let *theſe cups*, as of many, but as of one, Let *this cup* paſs from me. But, in reſpect of the bread, it is expreſly ſaid to be one, i. e. as expoſitors generally agree, one loaf. It is well known that the order of the words are as follows: [ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος ἓν σῶμα οἱ πολλοί ἐσμεν] " Becauſe the bread is one, " we, being many, are one body." Which Dr. Whitby paraphraſes thus: ' The loaf or bread is one; and we all partake of one loaf, and ' therefore are one body.' This he improves againſt the practice of the Church of Rome, who diſtributes to her communicants ſeverally an unbroken wafer; ſo that, as the Doctor obſerves, they neither are partakers of one bread or loaf, or of bread broken, as ſaith he, it was the cuſtom both of Jews and chriſtians to do, i. e. the one at the paſſover, and the other at the ſupper. But then, why do proteſtants break ſeveral loaves, the pieces of which are received by the members of the ſame church? If they partake of bread broken, is it of one bread? *The bread* and *one bread* are ſynonymous phraſes, and ſignify one lump or loaf. And Dr. Gill has given us from Dr. Lightfoot a very pertinent paſſage of a writer of note, whence it appears that the Jews thought it needful, in order to an aſſociation of this kind, that the bread whereof the members partake ſhould be originally in one loaf; and on the like principle do chriſtians commune at the table of their Lord. I am ſenſible that many have the following gloſs on this paſſage, namely, " As bread conſiſts of many " grains of corn, which being ground and kneeded together make up " one loaf, ſo believers being many are one body of which Chriſt is the " head." Thus they ſpeak, as if the apoſtle alluded to the compoſition of a loaf of corn bread; but I humbly apprehend this is not his deſign.

He

" for we are all partakers of that one bread." This idea of the ſacrament ſeems now little regarded; but, allowing the paſſage refers to the ſupper, which will ſcarce be denied, is not this as truly the counſel of God as the other? The firſt and principle deſign of this holy ordinance, is to exhibit the *natural* body of Jeſus in a figure, and to manifeſt his ſufferings and death, yet we are not to exclude from our view the deſign alſo of repreſenting the *myſtical* body of Chriſt, and our profeſſion of a union in him, by partaking together of one and the ſame bread, which is broken and divided in the communion of the faithful. This idea of the ſupper is adapted to holineſs, love, and that practical union, if I may ſo expreſs it, a great deficiency in which is too juſtly lamented in the preſent time. I mention it now on occaſion of this periphraſe

He is arguing, not from the compoſition of a loaf, but from the original unity of thoſe pieces in one lump, which are diſtributed to the ſeveral communicants in this goſpel-feaſt. And, in my opinion, it is not ſufficient to ſay, that the members of a church, all partake of bread, which is of the ſame nature or kind. Nothing leſs will come up to the argument of the apoſtle than this, that the bread whereof chriſtians partake in that divine ordinance, is at firſt or before it is broken, in one maſs or lump. And I think we cannot be too exact in the manifeſt circumſtances of a poſitive inſtitution of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. And I hope there needs no other apology for detaining the Reader with this long note, which I conclude with the following lines of that celebrated poetical expoſitor, the late Dr. Watts:

'We are but ſev'ral parts
'Of the ſame broken bread;
'One body hath its ſev'ral limbs,
'But Jeſus is the Head.

Watts's hymns, book 3. hymn 2. See alſo the ſeveral learned authors on the place abovementioned, and likewiſe Dr. Hammond, and the continuators of Mr. Henry, &c.

phraſe of the euchariſt *breaking bread*, which manifeſtly correſponds with the deſcription of the manner in which this ordinance is adminiſtred, one branch of which lies in breaking a ſingle loaf or lump of bread; for the abovementioned paſſage would be diveſted of all its propriety and argument, if the ancient cuſtom was not to have one lump only divided among the communicants, there being no other tolerable ſenſe in which thoſe who partake in this ordinance may be ſaid to participate of one bread, but that of the ſeveral pieces of which each receive one, being originally united in one lump and ſo preſented on the table, and broken aſunder, as the Lord hath ſhewn us. And this is the foundation of the apoſtle's reaſoning from the communion, unto the union of them who partake in it, as members of one body in Chriſt. If a ſtranger was to form his notion of the manner in the ſacrament from this place, he might juſtly be ſurprized, on being a ſpectator at this ordinance in the uſual method, to ſee a number of loaves divided on the occaſion, and at a loſs to reconcile it with the idea conveyed by the apoſtle in the paſſage referred to. How far this may deſerve conſideration, I leave to the Reader; but if it be lawful to conform in our practice to the reaſoning of a paſſage, which manifeſtly refers to this inſtitution, why ſhould we not? and eſpecially as it may eaſily be done. But to paſs this; breaking of bread being thus a conſtituent branch in the adminiſtration of the ſupper, no wonder it is mentioned under this phraſe; and that in ſpeaking of the diſciples aſſembling to eat it, it is ſaid they came together to break bread, as in Acts xx. 7, 11. And again,

again, 1 Cor. x. 16. ſaith the apoſtle, "the bread "which we break."

Now it is declared of theſe chriſtians, that they continued ſtedfaſtly in breaking of bread; they did not, as ſome, decline this branch of their holy profeſſion, but were conſtant and univerſal in a frequent attendance on the Lord at his table. In this precious inſtitution of the Saviour the ſum of the goſpel is collected, and ſometimes the ſweeteſt communion is found; it exhibits a crucified Jeſus, and is moſt wiſely adapted to promote the life and power of godlineſs, and to ſatisfy and rejoice the believer, who is looking for the bleſſed hope of his glorious appearance; and ſad is the ſymptom of a growing neglect of this holy ordinance among nominal chriſtians! But theſe firſt diſciples were zealous, and frequent in their attendance upon it; how frequent is not recited; ſome have thought daily, or at leaſt in every meeting, but the account we have of their coming together to break bread ſeems rather to ſuppoſe they had other meetings of a religious kind, in which that ordinance was not adminiſtered; however this is certain from 1 Cor. xi. 26. that they often eat this bread, and drank this cup. And from other accounts it ſeems to have been at leaſt every firſt day of the week; to which agrees the paſſage in John before mentioned, and alſo the practice of the church for centuries after the age of the apoſtles; for writers, both chriſtian and heathen, ſpeak of the biſhop giving the euchariſt on Sunday, when they were aſſembled to praiſe Chriſt and bind themſelves by a ſacrament, as the heathens obſerved;

obſerved; but the learned and impartial author of the conſtitution and diſcipline of the primitive church, page 19, obſerves, 'that in theſe days they commu-'nicated at leaſt three times a week, viz. Wed-'neſdays, Fridays, and Lord's-days.' It was celebrated in the evening at Troas, on the firſt day of the week, when Paul preached till midnight; and from the above-named writer, page 103, it appears, this ſupper was adminiſtred at the concluſion of their ſolemn ſervices, i. e. after they had read, ſung, preached and prayed, which ſolemnities were held either morning or evening, as beſt ſuited in the times of perſecution. However this euchariſt was given not yearly, or once in a quarter, which by no means anſwers to the frequency hinted in ſcripture; no, nor did theſe zealous diſciples content themſelves with a monthly commemoration of their Saviour's paſſion, which ſeems much too often for many nominal chriſtians in this day; for, being full of love to Jeſus Chriſt, and to each other, as members of the ſame body in him, they aſſembled every week or oftener, to join in this communion. They gloried in the croſs, and delighted in their union in Chriſt; and, as perſons longing after the preſence and honor of their Lord, and their mutual refreſhment and joy, they continued univerſally to come up together in his name, to eat at his table; thus they glorified their Saviour, and encouraged one another! An example worthy the imitation of all who profeſs chriſtianity.

It remains to conſider the laſt inſtance in which theſe diſciples perſevered. The apoſtle adds, *and in prayers.*

prayers. All prayer becomes the character of a chriſtian, but here is intended particularly the prayers of the church. The houſe of the Lord is an houſe of prayer; and the ſocial worſhip of his people lies much in their united and earneſt ſupplications at the throne of grace. Prayers attend every ſolemnity, but many are the occaſions of the church in this changeable and militant ſtate for ſolemn ſeaſons of prayer; and, indeed, in the beſt of times there is need of theſe opportunities in which the ſaints may "build up one "another on their moſt holy faith, praying in the Holy "Ghoſt." Now the primitive chriſtians applied themſelves earneſtly to this part of their duty in the houſe of God; they were conſtant, early and zealous at the appointed ſeaſons of prayer; and not like ſome who are excuſing themſelves on every occaſion. On perſons firſt ſetting out in the ways of the Lord, it is generally ſeen that they are diſpoſed to theſe meetings, and ready to come where prayer is wont to be made; but it often appears that ſuch are ſoon drawn aſide, and decline their attendance. It may likewiſe be obſerved that when prayer-meetings are newly ſet up, people flock for awhile; but, as if they came out of mere curioſity, in a very little time, many neglect or forſake them. Nor ſhould we be ſurprized that the carnally-minded are not to be held to this ſpiritual exerciſe; for the fleſh cannot bear the circumſpection, ſelf-denial, and holineſs, needful to a continuing inſtant in prayer; but, hearken, ye nominal chriſtians, who deſpiſe theſe appointments in the communities to which you belong! can you read this account without bluſhing? See how the love of Chriſt

conſtrained

conſtrained theſe diſciples! They continued ſtedfaſtly in prayers, being univerſally forward to fill their aſſemblies; and, are you conſcious of neglecting the prayers of the church in which you have a place, and of a diſinclination to join them? How dwells this love in your heart!

THUS ſtands divided a chriſtian profeſſion under four diſtinct branches, doctrine, fellowſhip, i. e. ſocial and mutual communications, breaking of bread in the ſupper of the Lord, and ſtated or occaſional aſſemblies for prayer: In each particular the primitive chriſtians, inſpired with zeal for the glory of Jeſus, and love to one another, were conſtant and active, purſuing every duty of their calling and communion in Chriſt, with an increaſing boldneſs and ardor; an illuſtrious ſpecimen of that faith by which alone a man is juſtified, receives remiſſion of ſins, and is entitled to a claim among the children of God. It is a faith which worketh by love, and will certainly influence the ſubject to a ſteady and fruitful behaviour as becomes the goſpel.

THAT many come ſhort of this noble example, it is needleſs to prove; but we may juſtly lament the little appearance there is of a general aim at the like perfection in obedience and love. The manner of living among the diſciples at firſt in Jeruſalem, to be conſidered hereafter, will further explain, illuſtrate and confirm the articles we have now been upon, and naturally induce to ſome remarks which would otherwiſe be pertinent here, I ſhall therefore, reſerving them for

a more ſuitable place, cloſe this lecture with a reflection, or rather an excitation to reflect, and labour after a conformity to this primitive ſpirit and conduct.

PERMIT me, my dear chriſtian Reader, to put you in remembrance, and to ſtir up your zeal. How different this behaviour of the primitive diſciples to that which appears among us at this day! Inſtead of continuing ſtedfaſtly, what numbers, through love of the world, or diſtruſt of the power and faithfulneſs of God, warp and ſoon turn aſide! Look round and conſider, who are they that continue and increaſe in a becoming boldneſs for the truth—that delight in the fellowſhip of the ſaints, freely communicating of their talents, natural and ſpiritual, for the edification of the church—that are frequent at the table of the Lord—and that are zealous in promoting aſſemblies for prayer? Bleſſed be God, there are ſome; but, muſt it not be owned that among nominal chriſtians, the generality content themſelves with bare hearing, and that in a manner uncertain and careleſs? But, among thoſe who have ſeparated themſelves to the ordinances of Chriſt, and are joined to his church, what lukewarmneſs, ſloth and inſtability is ſeen! How carnal, worldly and ſelfiſh! Do not earthly cares, affections, and pleaſures, openly engroſs the time and attention of many, to a general neglect of the duties and privileges which belong to a chriſtian profeſſion? In a word, how few are the inſtances in which men ſo withſtand the temptations they are under, and ollow after righteouſneſs, as to come up in any tole-

rable degree to this ſtandard of pure and vital chriſtianity! Witneſs the manner in which, by accounts, the ſolemn appointments of the churches are in common regarded, or rather in all appearance deſpiſed, to the increaſe of licentiouſneſs, and the grief of all who are heartily concerned for the faith and order of the goſpel! O that we conſidered the dignity and holineſs of the calling we profeſs, and lived up to our obligations and hope, and to the light we have received! Then ſhould we vie with, yea, and in ſome reſpects, exceed theſe worthy believers; but, alas they condemn us! They thus cleaved to the Lord with an holy fortitude, amidſt perſecutions and fiery trials; but as for us, though we pretend to the ſame divine character, and call ourſelves the diſciples or followers of a Captain, who overcame the world, and was made perfect through ſufferings; yet alas, how vain are the trifles that amuſe us from his precious appointments! What ſlight afflictions, and little ſelf-denial, will intimidate and ſtumble us; and, to ſay no more, what ſhameful excuſes are made by many profeſſors for their no leſs ſhameful habitual neglect of their ſtation in the houſe of God! I hope this is ſpoken to him that can by no means allow himſelf in a lukewarm and fruitleſs profeſſion: But, if any can read this account of the primitive chriſtians, and be careleſs and diſorderly; if he can, through ſloth, love of pleaſure, or from any other cauſe whatever, neglect the ordinances of the Lord, pour contempt on the ſolemn appointments of his church, and refuſe to join in her prayers, he betrays an obduracy and perverſneſs, yea and that want of love to Chriſt and his ways, which lays him under

under a juſt ſuſpicion of being the ſervant of ſin; at the thoughts of which who would not tremble?

No one can doubt, but that the deportment of theſe firſt diſciples is written for our imitation; let us then not be ſlothful, but followers of them, who thus after having adorned their chriſtian character, through faith and patience inherit the promiſes. Remember it becomes us to hold faſt our profeſſion in every branch: To be found in the doctrines of grace, to be filled with the fruits of ſocial virtue in our fellowſhip with the ſaints, to be frequent in a commemoration of the Lord at his table, and to continue inſtant in the prayers of his people, are things of the utmoſt importance to the glory of God, the advantage of thoſe with whom we are in communion, and the joy of them that watch for our ſouls, whoſe faithful account moſt nearly concerns us. By a ſtedfaſt adherence to theſe things, the world will know that we are the diſciples of Jeſus, and we may expect an increaſe in knowledge and faith, and to enjoy communion with God. Our boldneſs, both now and hereafter, depends much on our thus abiding in Chriſt, Pſalm cxix. 6. 1 John ii. 28. Unleſs we thus cleave to the Lord, we ſhall not be able to face the enemy with courage, nor can we uſe freedom in prayer; for how ſhall a man look up to Jeſus, who is a prieſt on his throne, when he is conſcious of neglecting his precepts? It is likewiſe of importance in our lateſt moments, if they are attended with reflection. What comfort can there be in a review of an unſtable and fruitleſs profeſſion? Divine forgiveneſs may ſupport the heart under this ſor-

rowful proſpect; but in proportion to a juſt ſenſe of this grace, the penitent will be filled with ſhame, and bitterly mourn his ungrateful backſlidings: Whereas he that ſtands faſt hath this rejoicing, the teſtimony of a good conſcience, and many ſweet promiſes to encourage him, particularly that capital one: "Be thou "faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of "life." Nor ſhould it be omitted that the real character of the righteous muſt hereafter be manifeſted and confirmed, by the inſtances of their love to Chriſt and his people, and how that will appear in their conduct who are ſlothful and careleſs, ſuch do well to conſider; therefore "abide in Chriſt, that, when he "ſhall appear, ye may have confidence, and not be "aſhamed before him at his coming."

In one word; nothing ſhort of this will poſſeſs mankind with a reverence of the Lord and his church, or induce renewed teſtimonies of the power and grace of God, whereby it may be known that he is in the midſt of a people to bleſs them. When perſons united under a profeſſion of the goſpel are lukewarm, diſorderly and licentious, they are left of God, whoſe Spirit is grieved, and become contemptible; but if they keep up to the temper and conduct of theſe firſt diſciples, and walk in love; as fear came on every ſoul around this chriſtian church, ſo it will be in a meaſure with them; for a church ſo walking together may be truly admired in the language of Solomon's Song, chap. vi. 10. with which I conclude, "Who is ſhe that looketh forth as "the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the ſun, and "terrible as an army with banners?"

LECTURE

LECTURE XVIII.

The manner in which theſe primitive diſciples lived together in the church at Jeruſalem.

IN this conciſe hiſtory of the primitive church, we have already ſeen the conſtant and earneſt purſuit of her members in every branch of their profeſſion. Impartiality and zeal are genuine ſymptoms of real piety, in which they abounded, and became an example to the faithful in every age. We now paſs to the ſecond general diviſion of the account, which contains their manner of living, comprehending their pleaſant ſituation, how their time was employed, the ſpirit or temper which prevailed among them, and the influence it had on thoſe who beheld them. The whole preſents us with a beautiful ſcene of brotherly love, and delight in the ways of the Lord!

As to their ſituation, we are told, ver. 44. that "all that believed were together." Επί τὸ αὐτὸ, i. e. literally *in the ſame*; this may be variouſly applied; they were in the ſame judgment, and the ſame in point of experience and worſhip, they had one Lord, one faith, and one baptiſm; but this is included in ver. 42, already explained. They were alſo united in their affections one towards another, minding the ſame

thing, and, being knit together in love, as one man, they ſtrove for the faith of the goſpel, following the things which make for peace and mutual edification. Satan had not yet excited thoſe ſinful paſſions, too often ſeen among chriſtians, whereof come evil ſurmiſings, contentions and diviſions, to the diſturbance of their peace, and the diſgrace of their heavenly calling. The malicious and ſubtle adverſary indeed ſoon found means to ſtir up a vain-glorious diſpoſition, and occaſion ſchiſms among them, witneſs at Corinth; one was of Paul and another of Apollos, inſomuch that in 2 epiſt. xii. 20. the apoſtle ſaith, "I fear, leſt "when I come I ſhall not find you ſuch as I would— "leſt there be debates, envyings, wrath, ſtrife, &c." But at preſent and for awhile this church at Jeruſalem was free from theſe corruptions and diſorders, and the diſciples, as new-born babes, deſired the ſincere milk of the word, and were perfectly united in an harmonious purſuit after the glory of Chriſt and each other's comfort, having no party-views, or different aims in their communion together, but were of one accord and of one mind. Thus, Acts iv. 32, we are told, that "the multitude of them that believed, were of "one heart and of one ſoul."

THIS may alſo refer to the frequent meetings they held, which perfectly agrees with the account of their practice: "they were daily in the temple, and from "houſe to houſe," of which more hereafter. In this view it ſhews that they did not forſake the aſſembling of themſelves together, as the manner of ſome is, but aſſociated

aſſociated with conſtancy and delight, ſo that they were in a manner always in company.

AGAIN, they were together in one church-ſtate. The learned Dr. Lightfoot underſtands it of their keeping together in ſeveral companies or congregations, according to their languages, nations, and other connexions, &c. But I humbly apprehend, that if ſeparate congregations were needful for theſe or any other reaſons, as here among Proteſtants of different nations, for inſtance, the Dutch, the French, &c. yet it is evident they were but one church, even the ſame unto which the converts were added; nor do we read of any other in this famous city. On the contrary, we are told, chap. v. 11. that "great fear came upon "all the church," on account of Ananias and Sapphira. And ſtill further, chap. viii. 1. it is ſaid, that after the death of Stephen the martyr, "there was a "great perſecution againſt the church which was at "Jeruſalem." Still but one church at Jeruſalem; and therefore, I ſay, if the diſciples did on any occaſion, or for any purpoſes, at times meet together in ſeparate congregations, as obſerved, they were all in the ſame individual church-ſtate, there being no other then ſubſiſting; nor was the order or offices needful to form and organize particular churches, as afterwards, ſettled by the authority of Chriſt, through the hands of his apoſtles; and indeed it doth not appear that there ever was in the age of the apoſtles more than one church, at Jeruſalem, or in any other city or place whatever.

AND here it may be uſeful to pauſe, and reflect on the wide difference there is between the conduct of chriſtians in reſpect of church-communion in this day, and that of thoſe in the primitive times; *then* they continued together in every place, in one body, and that univerſally, ſo far as we learn, at leaſt this was the caſe, while they had gifts ſufficient, and were capable of doing it; but *now* alas, almoſt on every occaſion profeſſors divide, inſomuch that there is ſcarce a little town where perſons of the ſame eſſential faith and order, are not divided into what they call ſeparate church-ſtates, each of which are ſcarce able to perform the duties eſſential to their own well-being. It is neither my inclination nor province to cenſure any ſociety whatever; but, may I not decently move for a ſerious conſideration, whether it is agreeable to the ſpirit of chriſtianity, or for the intereſt and glory of the church thus to divide on every occaſion?

PARTICULAR congregations of believers incorporated in the order of the goſpel are certainly of divine inſtitution, and needful for the exerciſe of diſcipline, and other relative duties in the communion of ſaints on earth; accordingly there were many ſuch ſocieties in the apoſtolic age in the ſame country. Thus we read of the churches in Aſia, Macedonia, Galatia, and Judea; but when the diſciples in Jeruſalem, Corinth, Philippi, &c. are mentioned, it is always in the ſingular number, to ſhew they continued together in one body in Chriſt. It is true in thoſe days there were extraordinary gifts and helps; and if four, five or ſix

thouſand

thouſand believers inhabit a city or populous place, a miniſter of common abilities will ſcarce be able to diſcharge the paſtoral office among them, nor would the people be capable of knowing, loving, and performing their part to one another as members of a particular church ought to do. If therefore the number of chriſtians united in judgment is too many for the ordinary ends of communion, it is fit to ſeparate with mutual conſent; nevertheleſs it is moſt for the honor of the goſpel, and ſafeſt when the faithful, who dwell in one place, can commune together in one church, and when this cannot be attained, through ſome difference in point of doctrine or order, or by reaſon of the multitude of profeſſors, great care ſhould be taken to preſerve unity of affection and harmony, and to avoid every mean and low practice, whereby ſome have deſpiſed, or at leaſt ſhown but too great forwardneſs to diſcourage and leſſen neighbouring churches and miniſters, for if there is not brotherly love, a cordial friendſhip, and ſocial converſe maintained between goſpel-miniſters and churches, who thus as it were reſide together, it is a ſad reproach to our holy profeſſion, and ſatan will ſurely get an advantage. When therefore a carnal, private, ſelfiſh ſpirit prevails among miniſters, and the members of ſeparate congregations are not encouraged to correſpond with one another in the ſight of the world, in any place whatever, it is very unhappy and threatening. This was the opinion of the great Dr. Owen, in the preface to his Eſhcol, he ſays, 'It 'is convenient that all believers in one place ſhould 'join themſelves in one congregation, unleſs, through 'their being too numerous, they are by common con-

'ſent

'ſent diſtinguiſhed into more; which order cannot be 'diſturbed without danger, ſtrife, emulation, and 'breach of love.' I apprehend there may be other reaſons, of diſtinct congregations in one place, beſides that of numbers. But the danger from cauſeleſs ſeparation, as noted above, is too plainly verified, and ſhould induce him that ſeeks peace to unite, as far as he can, in fellowſhip with thoſe of another particular communion. And the primitive diſciples thus keeping together, notwithſtanding their vaſt increaſe, moſt certainly condemn thoſe diviſions and ſubdiviſions on every different opinion, which is ſo frequently ſeen in a day of lukewarmneſs and declenſion; whereby, in ſome places, the viſible church is crumbled into pieces, to the grief of good men. In a word, the diviſion of any chriſtian congregation, who can join together in the ordinances of the goſpel, under whatever ſpecious pretence, may gratify the luſts of men, but has no tendency to promote the truth of God, and is not to be encouraged by any who wiſh well to Zion.

But to return. This phraſe of the diſciples being together, is by ſome underſtood of their aſſociating in one place. It appears from Acts iv. 31. that even after a further increaſe of the church they met in one place, which was miraculouſly ſhaken while they were aſſembled. Hence it was an ancient deſcription of a particular church, that it is a 'ſociety of chriſtians* 'meeting together in one place, under their proper 'paſtors, for the performance of religious worſhip, and 'the exerciſe of chriſtian diſcipline:' which is, by the way,

* Enquiry into the conſtitution of the primitive church, p. 7.

way, utterly againſt the popular notion of a national church in any form whatever; but, as hinted already, I apprehend that we have in this clauſe their manner of life; they were together in a civil as well as in a religious ſenſe; a ſociety that communed together in natural, no leſs than in ſpiritual things: We ſhall preſently ſee that they had all things common, and lived on one ſtock. This continued awhile. Thus we read, chap. iv. 34. that "as many as were poſſeſſors of lands or "houſes, ſold them and brought the price of the things "that were ſold, and laid them down at the apoſtles "feet." Some have thought it incredible that any ſingle houſe ſhould accommodate ſo many thouſands, particularly with lodging; for as to an apartment in one of the towers of the temple, as ſome have ſuggeſted, Joſephus indeed aſſerts, that they made up an hundred beds. What is that to the number of diſciples? Beſides, is there any reaſon to imagine that the deſpiſed and perſecuted chriſtians ſhould have leave to dwell there? Nor is it at all needful to ſuppoſe that they dwelt in one houſe; perſons may be in one family, and yet have apartments at ſome diſtance from each other; and it is certain, the firſt chriſtians lived in different habitations, for we are told, ver. 46. that they "broke "bread from houſe to houſe:" nevertheleſs they were plainly one ſociety, ſupplied out of the ſame capital ſtock, which was raiſed from the free-will ſurrender of the ſubſtance belonging to them who joined the church as deſcribed; the depoſiting and diſpoſition of which, are recited in the fifth and ſixth chapter of the Acts. And here I cannot but vindicate the character of theſe noble chriſtians from the unworthy conceptions of ſome.

It has been inſinuated *, that one reaſon of the diſciples freely parting with their ſubſtance was this, namely, 'that being reſolved to cleave to the apoſtles, 'and apprehending the approach of the deſtruction of 'Jeruſalem, when they knew they muſt flee and leave 'all to the enemy, they therefore were willing to part 'with their eſtates for the benefit of the church.' This I think is a groundleſs conjecture, and rather ungenerous: If it was certain that the Romans were inſtantly coming, and would ſeize on the country of the Jews, it would have been natural, in them that believed it, to have parted with their eſtates; and ſince the multitude gave no heed to the prediction of our Lord, there would doubtleſs have been many to purchaſe, for under theſe circumſtances they muſt be ſuppoſed to have bought at a very low price; but the deſtruction of Jeruſalem was near forty years diſtant, and there is no reaſon for imputing the conduct of the primitive diſciples to any ſuch motive; their manifeſt zeal for the goſpel, and love to each other, was more than a ſufficient inducement to part with their houſes and lands for the relief of their brethren; they therefore not only ſold them, but (except in the caſe of Ananias and Sapphira) they every one delivered up the whole of their produce to the apoſtles; and this they did not without cauſe, for it appears, that after all the generoſity of thoſe who had poſſeſſions among them, in a time of perſecution they ſoon ſtood in need of the contribution of others. Upon the whole, I ſay it ſeems

* Dr. Whitby's annotation on Acts ii. 45. and Dr. Doddridge's ote on the ſame place.

ſeems unworthy the character of theſe noble followers of the Lamb, to ſuppoſe that a conſideration ſo low and carnal ſhould in any degree move them to their ſeaſonable and rich liberality.

Some affect to imitate the primitive chriſtians, by attempting to live in the manner they did; and it is probable that the above ſuggeſtion was with a view to prevent this vain-glorious pretence; but we are not to have recourſe to conjectures that detract from the faithful in their becoming zeal on an extraordinary occaſion, to obviate the deſigns of crafty men, who under a ſpecious ſhew of religion, decoy the ſimple out of their property and freedom, againſt reaſon and ſcripture. It is plain from the ſacred hiſtory that this manner of communion was owing to the peculiar circumſtances the diſciples were in at preſent; and, as has been frequently and juſtly obſerved, that it was never intended to be a precedent in a ſettled ſtate of chriſtianity, ſince it appears from the current of the epiſtles, that members of churches are ſpoken of as rich and poor, and many exhortations are given which could have no place, if it was the duty or excellency of chriſtians in ſociety, to have all things common, as they had at this time in Jeruſalem. The inſtitutions of the goſpel are not advanced on the ruins of morality. 'Chriſt's goſpel (ſay the continuators of Mr. 'Pool's annotations) does not deſtroy the law; and 'the eighth commandment is ſtill in force, which it 'could not be if there was no property, or meum and 'tuum now.' And indeed, however ſome may boaſt in this notion, or practice of ſocial religion, it has a natural

natural tendency to deſtroy the foundations of order and government, both in the world and in the church, and accordingly to be ſhunned and rejected, as a deluſion and unworthy the goſpel of Chriſt.

THIS was the ſituation and manner of the diſciples in the infant ſtate of the church, *all that believed were together*, i. e. they were ſupplied out of one common ſtock, which aroſe from the ſubſtance of thoſe who had poſſeſſions, which they ſold; a conduct by no means ſuited to the manifeſt duties of believers in an ordinary church-ſtate, all pretence to which is abſurd and unſcriptural, if not downright immoral. Nevertheleſs it was a wiſe and noble inſtance of charity in the primitive church, by which every covetous or ſtraight-handed perſon, who aſſumes the name of a chriſtian, ſtands condemned to the end of the world. And however diſagreeable to ſome the obſervation may be, this example of love proves that, in a right ſtate of things, the diſciples of Jeſus, conſtrained by his grace, will be as much as poſſible together, in order to a mutual and free communication of their talents for the ſupport of his kingdom and the good of each other; and conſequently that a narrow and ſelfiſh ſpirit, and a roving diſpoſition, will never anſwer the end of chriſtian communion.

LECTURE

LECTURE XIX.

How the disciples at Jerusalem were employed, with practical notes on their conduct.

WE are now to consider in what manner the primitive christians filled up their time in the situation we left them. Idle professors might find an occasion, and there is reason to fear that some would abuse a communion circumstanced as that at Jerusalem, in favor of the flesh, but great was the grace bestowed on these disciples; they seem one and all to be inspired from heaven to a diligent proof of their calling and election of God, in pursuit of which they divided their time between religious exercises and those which are civil.

THE immediate design of their union was religion, and to serve God through Jesus Christ; accordingly it is first related, that "they continued daily with "one accord in the temple." They were now of the true circumcision, who worshipped God in the Spirit, and knew that in every place where his people were gathered in his name, his presence and blessing were insured; nevertheless the temple, as an house of prayer, was not yet totally abolished; they therefore forsook not the public assembly, but daily resorted unto it at the appointed season. Thus we read, chap. iii. that at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour, or three

three of the clock in the afternoon, the time of the daily ſacrifice, and the hour when Jeſus the Lamb of God expired on the croſs, Peter and John went into the temple. Some nominal chriſtians would think it a burden to be called upon an hour in a week, or perhaps in a month for ſocial prayer, except on the ſabbath; but it was the daily practice of theſe primitive chriſtians to attend in the temple, beſides many private meetings among themſelves. What a wearineſs would this be to ſome profeſſors! Indeed prayers may be followed ſeveral times in a day, in a vain and ſuperſtitious manner, yet there is no ſuperſtition in the daily prayers of the church; nor are they inconſiſtent with other duties in life, if things were rightly managed, perſons in common might find time to wait upon God, without being ranked among the idle who neglect their civil occupation, or to provide for their families; neither are the prayers which in many places of worſhip are now day after day for the moſt part literally and properly read to empty pews, within the bare walls of our churches; theſe, I ſay, are not the relics of popery, as ſome may imagine, but the contempt thrown upon them a melancholy ſymptom of our ſad declenſion from that piety, and delight in ſocial prayer, which ſince the reformation once prevailed in the land! Indeed we are not held to ſet hours under the preſent diſpenſation, but it is a goſpel-precept to pray without ceaſing; and it ſurely then becomes us to be frequently, if not daily, uniting in our prayers to the Lord, for which ſeaſons muſt be appointed, a neglect of which diſcovers want of inclination to this divine ſervice; and the truth is that ſome, being eager in a purſuit

purſuit after the buſineſs and pleaſures of life, their manner will not admit of a regular and conſtant attendance in the church, or the family; and it is to be feared that there are but too many prayerleſs people among us of every denomination, againſt whom, if they repent not, Papiſts, yea and Mahometans, who perform their devotion five times a day, and eſteem prayer * the pillar of heaven and key of paradiſe, will riſe up in judgment.

But again; as theſe diſciples were daily in the temple, it is likewiſe declared they were ſo in "breaking bread from houſe to houſe." This is explained in the next clauſe, by its being ſaid, "they eat their meat;" a phraſe no where applied to that ſpiritual repaſt, the ſupper of our Lord, and therefore muſt refer to their natural meals. Some underſtand it of friendly entertainments, which they apprehend was made at each others houſes; but, if as many of them as had houſes or lands, made ſale of the ſame and ſurrendered the purchaſe, as deſcribed, I pray, who could provide theſe feaſts for their friends? Hoſpitality is one fruit of brotherly love; but it ſeems inconſiſtent with the ſtate of this ſociety, in which all things were common, to ſuppoſe that they treated one another in this manner. I am, therefore, of opinion that this breaking of bread from houſe to houſe, was no other than their commons, prepared in different apartments or houſes, in which proviſion was made by agreement, as ſuited their ſtate, and the purpoſes of their communion together, which may eaſily be conceived in a body ſo compacted as theſe chriſtians

* Sales's preliminary diſcourſe to the koran, p. 142.

ſtians. Thus they went on from day to day, joining in the worſhip of God in his temple or in church-aſſemblies, and likewiſe at home, for they had houſes to eat and to drink in, where they partook of the bounties of providence together.

Now this ſocial communion, in reſpect both of natural and religious enjoyments, was maintained and carried on in a ſpirit and temper every way ſuited to their holy profeſſion. In the firſt place, we are told they did it *with gladneſs*. A ſad countenance is no proper ſymptom of unfeigned piety; and I ſee no reaſon why this ſhould not include a natural chearfulneſs, which will be felt in proportion to bodily health, and a juſt ſenſe of the divine bounty. "Go thy "way, (ſays the wiſe man) eat thy bread with joy, "and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for God "now accepteth thy works," Eccleſ. xviii. 7. Who ſo fit to take a ſober and moderate joy in the creature as the chriſtian, whoſe God is his portion? In this ſenſe, the man whoſe ſins are forgiven him, may be of good cheer; but no doubt a ſpiritual joy is principally intended. Ἀγαλλιάσει; the ſame word in Jude ver. 24. is rendered exceeding joy, and ſignifies not meerly a gladneſs of heart, but a viſible exultation, and ſuppoſes external ſymptoms, ſo that it may refer to their ſpiritual diſcourſe, ſaying, as the diſciples after the Lord was departed, "Did not our heart burn "within us while he talked with us by the way, and "while he opened to us the ſcriptures?" Luke xxiv. 32. Thus might they enquire of each other, and communicate of their experience, and, being filled with

with joy, ſing praiſes together; for, however ſtrange it may now ſeem, there is reaſon to conclude that the primitive chriſtians rarely parted at any time without prayer and ſinging. However religion is in a flouriſhing ſtate, when from the houſe of prayer the faithful come rejoiced in the loving-kindneſs of the Lord, and ſatisfied in the riches of his grace, they ſit down together at the table of providence in their own houſes with a ſingular chearfulneſs, while feeding their bodies their ſouls are feaſted in a remembrance of his favor. Thus their joy is double, of which ſtrangers to real piety can form no adequate idea.

AGAIN, with *ſingleneſs of heart*. The term, αφελότης here rendered *ſingleneſs* is uſed no where elſe; it ſignifies plain, upright and honeſt, and moſt emphatically expreſſes the utmoſt ſimplicity. It is the teſtimony of God, who ſearcheth the reins, and a glorious part of the character of theſe diſciples, that they continued together without any ſiniſter, private or ſelfiſh view, being free from carnal motives in their fellowſhip; no crafty deſigns, or mean underhand doings, were practiced among them. Here might be hypocrites, but in general they aſſociated with a pure heart, and unfeigned love of the brethren, and their conduct was frank and open, like thoſe who had a ſingle eye to the glory of God, and their mutual honor and comfort. This ſtands in a natural connexion with the chearfulneſs that ſpread through their company; "for "(ſaith the apoſtle) our rejoicing is this, the teſti-"mony of our conſcience, that in ſimplicity and "godly ſincerity, not with fleſhly wiſdom, but by

" the grace of God we have had our converſation in " the world, and more abundantly to you wards," 2 Cor. i. 12. Thus upright and ſincere were theſe primitive chriſtians, without oſtentation or covetouſneſs. O that the like teſtimony could be born to the ſpirit and conduct of all who bear the name of chriſtianity, and are in communion with the faithful! But, alas, ſome are of a contrary diſpoſition, and but too plainly diſcover on every occaſion their private views. Hence ſtrife and vain-glory, animoſities and diviſions, whereby the church is ſometimes torn and defaced, and ſore diſcouragements are laid on the hearts of them that truly love God.

ONCE more; it is further declared that the diſciples went on in theſe aſſociations *praiſing God.* As obſerved, the term rendered *gladneſs* carries in it a joy expreſſed by ſome bodily exerciſe, ſuch as leaping, dancing and ſinging, &c. Now here we learn the nature of that joy which poſſeſſed the hearts of theſe chriſtians, and how it appeared; not by the ranting noiſe of ſenſualiſts, who ſing and roar like madmen and fools; their joy, like themſelves, is carnal and impious, blazing with a noiſe, and tranſitory as the crackling of thorns under a pot; nor was it like that of thoſe degenerate and ſhameful Iſraelites complained of in Iſa. v. 12. " The harp, the viol, the tabret " and pipe, and wine are in their feaſts: but they " regard not the work of the Lord, neither conſider " the operation of his hands." Not ſo at the table of the faithful at Jeruſalem, their rejoicing was holy and ſpiritual, and terminated in the honor of their heavenly

heavenly Father, whoſe abounding mercies, temporal and eternal, inſpired them with gratitude. To God they lift up their voices together, with adoration and praiſe, to celebrate his love. Now they might praiſe God in their meetings at theſe repaſts of a natural kind, as well as in thoſe more immediately appointed for religious ſervice in ſeveral ways; by their application for a bleſſing, with thanks, for the food of the body; which however ſome make light of, or ſcruple, is due to our bountiful Father, and a means of ſanctifying the creatures we receive, 1 Tim. iv. 5. an example of which we have in our Lord, who, when he fed the people with the meat that periſheth, firſt gave thanks unto God, John vi. 11. which is alſo noticed by the evangeliſt Matthew. And thus ſaith the apoſtle, "He that eateth to the Lord, giveth God "thanks," Rom. xiv. 6. In ſhort, it is unworthy the knowledge of God, and much more of the goſpel of Chriſt, to ſit down to our food, and riſe up, without giving thanks. But to return, the diſciples praiſed God in their diſcourſe; their Maſter had ſhewn them to improve their meals by entering on ſubjects that are ſpiritual and divine, Luke vii. 40. xiv. 7. and on other occaſions. Chriſtians loſe much by omitting this manner of edification. Hence the tongue of thoſe who talk much and do nothing, are notoriouſly proud, licentious or diſorderly in their conduct, condemn them; it may be juſt to caution againſt an affected loquacity on religious ſubjects, which is odious and vain; but this appears not to me a prevailing evil in the preſent generation; the table-talk of moſt chriſtian families, as far as I can

learn, rarely turns on any ſubject that ſhould give the leaſt diſguſt to thoſe who are ſtrangers to the power of religion; at leaſt in general, we ſeem little to be charged with this kind of imprudence, but are much more polite, or rather ſlow in our diſcourſe; yet it is certain that when perſons are affected with the love of God, and a ſenſe of divine things, they are very much diſpoſed to mention them. And if, as our Lord obſerves, Matt. xiii. 34. "out of the abundance "of the heart the mouth ſpeaketh," of which no man can doubt, is it not reaſonable then to expect that believers, on returning from the enjoyment of God in his ſanctuary to their own houſes, for the refreſhment of nature, ſhould remind one another, and praiſe God together for the ſpiritual benefits they have received? Was this the practice, we might hope to ſee more ſpirituality among us; our children, ſervants and friends, who ſtand round about us, might be edified thereby, and be ready to bleſs us in the name of the Lord. And further, God may be praiſed by his people even at their own tables, at leaſt before they ſeparate from theſe entertainments, in pſalms, hymns and ſpiritual ſongs, in which manner we are directed to teach and admoniſh one another, Col. iii. 16. and, why not in our own houſes, or family-aſſemblies? Is the ſinging an hymn confined to the ſanctuary, or forbid elſewhere? Should not every chriſtian family be as a little church? and may not thoſe who love God take any fit opportunity to ſtir up each other and to join in his praiſe? And ſhall the ignorant and malicious reproaches of worldly men, who are not aſhamed of their empty, if not filthy and impious

impious ballads, intimidate chriſtians from the entertainment and profit of united ſongs to the honor of God, and their bleſſed Redeemer?

THIS then is noted of theſe primitive chriſtians; they were not only joyful and upright, but chearful and grateful, praiſing God. They might decently praiſe the food which they eat, as delicious and good in its kind; this is proper and uſeful in its place; but, doth it not rather look ſenſual to confine our diſcourſe to this ſubject? However they praiſed God, i. e. their converſation in general turned not on ſelf-applauſe, or any thing trifling and carnal; but in all their meetings, both in the church and at home, they communed on things adapted to edify the ſoul, and to quicken one another in glorifying their Saviour. How different are they whoſe converſation is full of ſlander and backbiting, filthy diſcourſe or vain jeſting, which is very offenſive and ſinful! I hope the Reader is far from indulging a practice ſo ſhameful; ſuch table-talk is hateful and ſcandalous; but, have we not too much reaſon to bluſh on reflection? How little proceeds from our mouth in ordinary converſe which is good, to the uſe of edifying, that it may miniſter grace to the hearers!

IT remains to obſerve, the influence this manner of life had upon the world about them. And it appears that this harmony, affection and faithfulneſs among themſelves, which it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe was attended with an affable and courteous behaviour to others, the genuine fruit of vital religion, gave the

diſciples an high reputation, for we are told, they had "favor with all the people." Some underſtand this of the favor ſhewn by the diſciples to all people, i. e. ſay they, their charity was not confined to themſelves, but extended to others who were not of their own community. And it muſt be owned, that we are taught to do good unto all, but eſpecially to the houſhold of faith, which catholic ſpirit is ſuited to the genius of the goſpel, yet this interpretation ſeems ſtrained. Theſe chriſtians indeed were kind and condeſcending to every one, but they had little opportunity of helping others, being themſelves, as a ſociety, often in need, as hinted before, notwithſtanding the generoſity of thoſe who had property among them, which we have reaſon to think were comparatively few; it is therefore moſt natural to apply the paſſage to the reſpect ſhewn them by the people in general. This amiable ſpirit and conduct gained the good-will of the multitude, however reproached and vilified by ſome malicious unbelievers, who envied their union and ſucceſs, and afterwards raiſed bitter perſecution againſt them. Nevertheleſs, at preſent, their ſtedfaſtneſs in cleaving together in the Lord, and their holy converſation in other reſpects, manifeſted their excellency to the conſciences of thoſe who beheld them, who could not but admire, as in future periods it is recorded they did, inſomuch that it was common for the heathens to ſay of the chriſtians, with aſtoniſhment, Behold, how they love one another! Thus theſe diſciples, like Jeſus himſelf, being made wiſe, increaſed in favor with God and man. The Lord was viſibly with them, by the ſigns and wonders that were done by the apoſtles, ſo that "fear

"came

" came upon every ſoul," and their lovely deportment rendered them in a manner univerſally grateful. In this way ſhould all who are ſeparated by a profeſſed ſubjection to the goſpel adorn it, and by a ſavor of its divine influence in the whole of their conduct, gain the eſteem of mankind; for a looſe and light behaviour in perſons who pretend to the high calling of God, is ſhameful, and uſually brings them into contempt: So true is it, " that they who honor God " ſhall be honored, but they who deſpiſe him ſhall be " lightly eſteemed," 1 Sam. ii. 30. Thus it is frequently ſeen that a man whoſe converſation is uncomely under a religious character, is deſpiſed even by the world; and he alone may expect to have eſteem who acts up to his profeſſion; it is the holy, juſt and friendly behaviour of a people united in the fellowſhip of the goſpel that convinces mankind of their ſincerity, and is likely to induce that reſpect, which may, under a bleſſing, promote the faith of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt in the world.

SUCH, I apprehend, was the manner of the firſt diſciples at Jeruſalem; they cleaved to the Lord and one another with purpoſe of heart, and were together, as we ſaw in the preceeding lecture, not only in point of affection and judgment, and in one church-ſtate, but they lived together as one family; though on account of their number they were divided into ſeparate apartments or houſes, yet they had all things common, being each as they lacked ſupplied from one ſtock or fund, raiſed in the manner deſcribed. And now it appears that in this extraordinary ſituation their time

was

was employed in daily aſſembling themſelves in the temple for divine ſervice, from whence they returned to partake together of the bounties of providence, breaking bread from houſe to houſe; with an holy chearfulneſs and unfeigned ſimplicity, they mingled their common meals for the refreſhment of nature with thoſe communications of a ſpiritual kind, whereby they were mutually excited to join in praiſing the Lord; thus they lived a life of devotion to God and mutual affection, which procured an univerſal eſteem. O happy and honorable ſociety! How pleaſant and bleſſed the communion, when the diſciples thus walked together in the fear of the Lord, with integrity and brotherly love! Theſe were halcyon days, when there was nothing to diſturb the public tranquility, or diſquiet the hearts of the faithful, but all fair and ſerene, to the glory of God and the joy of his people! But, alas, how tranſitory this beauty and gladneſs in Zion! It was not to laſt; the ſaints muſt be tried; and ſatan, who is the prince of the power of the air, ſoon obtained permiſſion to blow up a tempeſt, and threaten the ark of the Lord. In a ſhort time, as he hath ever ſince more or leſs, did the enemy, by a variety of cruel perſecutions, foul apoſtaſies and damnable hereſies, tear and mangle the viſible body of Chriſt, if poſſible to deſtroy it; but we know the church ſtands ſecure; the gates of hell ſhall not prevail againſt her, to her ruin, or even ſo as to prevent her perfection in the end, yet this primitive glory of the church is in a meaſure gone off for awhile, and her members have not that ſatisfaction and joy in her commu-

communion the diſciples had, when in the ſimplicity of her infant ſtate.

But now, my dear Reader, it may be proper to obſerve, that you are not to expect, or even wiſh for a communion ſo circumſtanced, in every reſpect, as that in which the diſciples were united before the goſpel was ſpread, and chriſtian churches eſtabliſhed. It is plain, as obſerved, that a community of goods, and living together as theſe chriſtians did, is now contrary to the word of God, and inconſiſtent with the duties of our holy profeſſion, in the church and in the world; ſo that, as I have ſhewn, every pretence of forming ourſelves in this manner, under a notion of coming near to the original pattern of chriſtianity, is unſcriptural and vain; nevertheleſs, the union, affection, ſimplicity, and manners, of the firſt diſciples, ſo far as they conſiſt with the plan laid down in the New-Teſtament, are certainly much to be deſired, yea and to be hoped for in waiting on the Lord; at leaſt, keeping himſelf in the love of God, each one may expect a conformity in ſome good meaſure to this amiable ſtandard, and the ſpirit of religion being invariably the ſame, I ſhall cloſe the lecture with a few brief remarks by way of reflection.

And firſt we may note, that it is the inclination and the intereſt of the diſciples of Jeſus, as much as may be, to aſſociate together. It is in the nature of intelligent creatures to be ſocial; ſo that they who, being called, have caſt in their lot, as heirs together of the grace of life, ſhould naturally cleave to each other

other in the Lord. The believer can truly appeal to his God and declare, in the words of the Pſalmiſt, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of "them that keep thy precepts," Pſalm cxix. 63. His heart's deſire is to the fellowſhip of the ſaints, the excellent of the earth, in whom is all his delight; and while brotherly love continues, the faithful are manifeſtly glad of each others company, inſomuch that whatever appearance there may be of indifferency to this among nominal chriſtians, in a ſtate of lukewarmneſs and ſorrowful diviſions, it is certain that this holy and happy inclination or deſire keeps pace with the life and power of godlineſs; a decay from this, which is the ſame with a defection from the love of God, is a principal ſource of that dangerous, and for the moſt part fatal drawing-back, the forſaking the aſſembling of ourſelves together. Frequent aſſemblies are abſolutely needful to ſupport a church-ſtate, and the building ourſelves on our moſt holy faith, without which a people cannot keep themſelves in the love of God, as directed Jude ver. 20, 21. Nor can believers in a ſocial or private capacity, expect to flouriſh without them, but in keeping together on every occaſion they knit faſter in love, and become endeared to one another in conſequence of reciprocal acts of kindneſs and friendſhip. It therefore is of great advantage to the intereſt of religion, when they who fear the Lord are ſeeking every fit opportunity to converſe together: And this will be the caſe when perſons are in good earneſt, ſeeking firſt the kingdom of God and the things which are Chriſt's. They may be providentially interrupted from aſſociating; but, being conſtrained by divine

divine love, they are no ſooner at liberty, but, like Peter and John, when let go from their confinement by the Jews, they joyfully return to their own company, which is no other than their brethren in Chriſt.

AGAIN; this example proves that they who aſſociate in the fear of God, are diſpoſed, and will ſtudy to improve their meetings together to their ſpiritual advantage. In the temple or aſſemblies of the church, this is directly and profeſſedly in view; but I principally refer to chriſtians when met in their own houſes, or occaſionally from time to time in any other place; particularly their viſits one among another, in which they have an hoſpitable intercourſe, and chearfully partake of the bounties of Providence as relations or friends; ſuch opportunities may be employed to the purpoſes of religion, without infringing on a becoming regard to things of the world. I am far from cenſuring diſcourſe on ſubjects which relate to civil and natural life, which is ſometimes becoming and uſeful; but then, ſhould they ſpend their whole time on temporal things? Is there no opportunity on ſuch occaſions to communicate ſomething for the ſoul, and which relates to eternity? And, is it not decent and profitable for them who are heirs of ſalvation, if poſſible, to make every ſeaſon ſubſervient to their meetneſs for glory? We have ſeen that there is the higheſt reaſon to conclude that the firſt diſciples, at their common meals, refreſhed one another with ſpiritual things. And it is certain, with this expectation Paul deſired to have an interview with the chriſtians at Rome: "For I long to ſee you, (ſaith "he)

" he) that I may impart ſome ſpiritual gift unto you, " to the end that ye may be eſtabliſhed; that is, that " I might be comforted together with you, by the " mutual faith both of you and me," Rom. i. 11, 12. In which place, I apprehend, the apoſtle doth not ſo much intend his imparting extraordinary gifts, or what he might communicate in the exerciſe of his office, as their conferences in relation to faith and experience, ſince their communications were mutual, at leaſt I think there is no reaſon to queſtion that theſe are included; and it would tend much to a revival of a ſpirit of religion among us, if it was the ſtudy of chriſtians to accommodate their viſits in this manner to the promoting of their ſpiritual intereſt. But permit, my dear Reader, a word of advice. In order to carry on this pious deſign two things are needful: Firſt, that theſe friendly entertainments at home are ſo contrived as not to interfere with the appointed ſeaſons of the ſanctuary. Is it becoming a chriſtian to ſay, I have a friend on a viſit, and therefore cannot come up to the houſe of the Lord? This is ſometimes the caſe, through companions who fear not his name, or it may be through careleſſneſs, which are both to be avoided by him who would profit in religion. No appointment for ſocial entertainment in thy own habitation, ſhould ordinarily take place againſt ſtated and known ſeaſons ſet apart for aſſembling in the church. This may be thought by ſome rather too ſtrict; but a man, who thirſts after God, will ſo order his affairs, and when he can, deny himſelf at home rather than be deprived of an opportunity in the houſe of the Lord. And then it is further neceſſary to obtain

tain this advantage, that our civil and friendly entertainments be mingled with exercises of a spiritual kind, which consist with those meetings, such as praying together, and some serious and heavenly discourse; surely this might give life and joy to a company of believers, when regaling themselves in moderation with the good things of life, without abating a desirable relish in their natural enjoyments. Certain I am that this is the way to be filled with each others company, as it is expressed in Rom. xv. 24. Whereas, through a total neglect of these things, we often empty one another in our visits, and come together, not for the better, but for the worse, at least in respect of the soul.

It may further be noted, that one fruit of that faith which worketh by love is an hospitable and liberal spirit. The primitive christians are a noble example of the power of the gospel in this respect; it enlarged their hearts to be generous in parting with their substance for the common good, without any reserve to themselves; this, indeed, in ordinary circumstances, is not required, but the love of God will certainly purify a man from covetousness, and promote in him a bountiful disposition. Thus, no sooner was the heart of Lydia opened, but the doors of her house were open to receive the ministers and disciples of Jesus, Acts xvi. 15. The apostle James asserts, that faith without works is dead, and likewise shews that works of mercy and love are essential to that which is saving: nor can any thing be more contrary to the real spirit of christianity than a morose, narrow and selfish temper.

per. That man who is not willing to ſhew kindneſs, and do good to every one, but eſpecially to his brethren in the Lord, as directed in the goſpel of Chriſt, ſhould look to himſelf. If we do not as it were waſh the ſaints feet, and miniſter to their neceſſities according to our ability, yea and alſo delight in ſhewing all manner of reſpect to the people of God, we want an eſſential evidence of grace in the heart. Let no unprofitable profeſſor flatter himſelf, for pure religion is love; not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

MOREOVER it appears that the fruits of faith are abiding. Theſe chriſtians continued in their harmony and love; they were not, as ſome, unſtable as water; neither is true religion a fickle or tranſitory thing, nor is it partial. He that fears God, is habitually conſtant and univerſal in obeying the truth; and this will appear in his behaviour under a profeſſion of the goſpel. To which may be added, that the believer finds unſpeakable delight in the ways of the Lord; they are ways of pleaſantneſs, and paths of peace to his ſoul. Strangers conceive not the gladneſs and joy that attend the ſaints who walk together in love, in the order of Chriſt. Their communion is ſweet, who can ſay, "Have fellowſhip with us; truly our fellowſhip is "with the Father, and with his Son Jeſus Chriſt.

FINALLY, we ſee that the viſible and cloſe union of chriſtians, and their mutual offices of kindneſs, is a ſtriking evidence to all around them of their real religion. By this faith is ſeen, and the world is convinced.

Whereas

Whereas ſhort of this teſtimony, the greateſt attainment in knowledge and gifts, or the higheſt profeſſion of zeal for the truths and ordinances of the goſpel, is vain; it fails of proving a man under the dominion of grace. He is nothing who hath not this charity, in the exerciſe of which the doctrine of God our Saviour is adorned; but, in this practice of piety and goodneſs, the calling and election of the chriſtian appears. Thus ſaith the Lord, "By this ſhall all men "know that ye are my diſciples, that ye love one ano-"ther," John xiii. 35. May the Spirit of love and of a ſound mind be poured out from on high on all that call on the name of the Lord, that, being thus found in the faith, they may abound in every fruit of righteouſneſs, to the conviction of gainſayers, and to the praiſe of the glory of him that hath called them out of darkneſs into his marvellous light!

LECTURE XX.

The daily increaſe of the primitive church.

AMONG all the extraordinary and entertaining things related of the ſaints at Jeruſalem, it is none of the leaſt that the Lord was with them. He crowned his goſpel with continual ſucceſs, and the number of diſciples multiplied greatly; for we are told, that "the Lord added to the church daily ſuch

" as ſhould be ſaved." It was their glory and happineſs to be in perfect harmony and love, and in favor with man, but ſtill more ſo to enjoy the viſible preſence and bleſſing of Jehovah; the beauty of the Lord their God was upon them, and he eſtabliſhed the work of their hands. In this pleaſing account the following particulars are included, namely, the denomination under which the diſciples are mentioned, their daily increaſe, by whom theſe additions were made, and the peculiar deſcription of thoſe who were joined. A review of theſe articles, with brief notes upon them, and ſome reflections, will be the ſubject of this lecture, and finiſh our deſign on this uſeful part of ſacred eccleſiaſtical hiſtory.

THE Engliſh term *church*, under which the faithful here firſt ſtand deſcribed, an expreſſion often repeated in the New-Teſtament, is derived from two words, which may be rendered, 'the houſe or habitation of the Lord.' Thus the temple at Jeruſalem is frequently ſtiled; and a like phraſe is uſed of the ſpiritual temple, " the houſe of God," 1 Tim. iii. 15. over whom now Chriſt, who is the true God, preſides ſole lawgiver and king, as it is written, Heb. iii. 6. " But " Chriſt as a ſon over his own houſe, whoſe houſe are " we." But (εκκλησία) the word uſed here, and in all other places where church intends a ſociety of believers in order, is of another import, and ſignifies *to be called out*; ſo that the ſimple and native idea of a church, is a company of called perſons aſſembled together, which exactly correſponds with the true notion of a chriſtian of

* ΚΥΡΙΟΥ ΟΙΚΟΣ, which form the word *kirk*.

or goſpel-church, which is no other than a company of ſaints, who, being called by grace, according to the divine purpoſe, are built together, by a ſpecial covenant, and aſſociating themſelves in one time and place, for a mutual enjoyment of the appointments of their Lord and Redeemer.

CUSTOM has rendered it tolerable; but, however early or common the word has been applied to a houſe or place of aſſembly, as frequently to this day, it is nevertheleſs very improper; and though it might at firſt be innocently introduced, and is now uſed by many, who are far from intending any thing unworthy the ſpirituality of goſpel-worſhip, this liberty has been abuſed; inſtead of an ordinary houſe or apartment, as at firſt, ſtately piles have been raiſed, framed and adorned in a peculiar manner, under the name of a church, by which the vulgar have been captivated to a ſuperſtitious veneration for material buildings; it is therefore to be wiſhed, that this undue application of the word was renounced. Though ſome reſpectable perſons have been otherwiſe minded, I take leave to ſay, that I apprehend the meeting-place of the faithful for divine ſervice is no where in ſcripture certainly called a church. The paſſage in 1 Cor. xi. 18. is thus interpreted by ſome, "when ye come together in the "church," i. e. ſay they, into the place of meeting, which is thought to be confirmed by what follows, ver. 20. "when ye come together therefore into one "place." But, with ſubmiſſion, coming into the church is eaſily underſtood, and may ſignify no other than aſſembling together in a church-meeting; and

though it is true that ſuch meetings muſt be held in a particular place, yet the original words do not determinate it topical, but rather refer to the unity of the perſons who met, than to the place in which they aſſembled; they are the very words* uſed in Acts ii. 44. already conſidered in lecture XVIII. Alſo in chap. iii. 1. And again, in the iv-th chapter and 26th verſe. Now it cannot in either of theſe paſſages deſign a place or houſe of meeting. And as to the church the diſorderly Corinthians are ſuſpected of deſpiſing, mentioned ver. 22. it can by no means be applied to a material building, unleſs we ſuppoſe it conſecrated by divine authority, and therefore holy as the Jewiſh ſanctuary of old; but however ſome may plead for it, no ſcripture-warrant has yet, and, I preſume, never will be produced for this relative ſanctity in material buildings under the goſpel-diſpenſation. The church of God, whom theſe wanton profeſſors are ſuppoſed to contemn, and thoſe whom they put to ſhame, by the indecent and uncharitable practice reproved, appear to me to be one and the ſame; they are deſcribed as "having or poſſeſſing nothing," i. e. the poor, who may well be ſtiled the church, ſince they were a part, yea and it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe the major part of the church; for, "hath not God choſen the poor "of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the king-"dom?"

THIS expreſſion is uſed of different ſorts of aſſemblies; for inſtance, the town-clerk of Epheſus ſo ſtiles the multitude of crafts-men who gathered againſt the apoſtle,

* Επί τὸ αὐτὸ.

apoſtle, at the motion or call of Demetrius the ſilver-ſmith, Acts xix. 41. And in verſe 39, of that chapter, the ſame word is uſed for an orderly court of juſtice, in which he tells the ſeditious, their cauſe, if they had any juſt complaint, might be legally determined; other applications of the term may be produced, but for the moſt part, as here, it refers to the church of God; ſometimes to the inviſible and catholic church, which comprehends the whole election of grace, who are or ſhall be ſaved, and may be conſidered as called in the divine purpoſe. This is the church which is the body of Chriſt, over whom he is given to be head, the fulneſs of him that filleth all in all, Eph. i. 22, 23. even that church whom Chriſt loved, and gave himſelf for, and ranſomed with his blood, out of every kindred, tongue and nation, whoſe names are written in heaven, and who, being completely gathered, ſhall at laſt appear in one general and glorious aſſembly, and together poſſeſs the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

Some number the paſſage before us with thoſe that ſpeak of the church in this general ſenſe; but it is plainly hiſtorical, and refers to the ſaints in order at Jeruſalem. It is frequently taken for the viſible church on earth univerſally, or, as the fathers expreſſed it, 'the church diſperſed through the world to the ends 'of the earth *.' Thus we read, Acts xii. 1. that Herod, that bloody man, vexed certain of the church. And again, Gal. i. 13. ſays Paul, "I perſecuted the "church," i. e. the diſciples of Jeſus, wherever he found

* Enquiry into the primitive church, p. 2.

found them, Acts ix. 2. So then it is taken for all that call on the name of the Lord in every place, 1 Cor. i. 2. But the word is more frequently applied to a particular community, as in the inſtance before us. The diſciples were now a body corporate, aſſembling themſelves for chriſtian worſhip and diſcipline, under the immediate direction of the apoſtles; the firſt chriſtian church exiſting, and which, though not yet compleatly organized, (extraordinary circumſtances excepted) which the ſerious enquirer may eaſily diſtinguiſh, is the original pattern of fellowſhip in the goſpel. Thus as the diſciples were firſt called chriſtians at Antioch, ſo in a ſocial capacity they were firſt ſtiled a church at Jeruſalem. Henceforward, being thus united, and walking together in every place, they were called a church. Of theſe churches, we have ſeen, there were many in the time of the apoſtles. And accordingly we read of the churches of Judea, Galatia, Macedonia, and Aſia, and likewiſe of all the churches of the ſaints. Theſe churches were originally of the ſame faith and order; they each held the ſame doctrine, and the ordinances were the ſame in every community, 1 Cor. vii. 17. and they maintained a reſpectful and affectionate correſpondence with each other, by meſſengers, letters of commendation and advice, with every office of love in their power, as circumſtances required; things too little regarded in a ſtate of lukewarmneſs and diviſion, being always diſcouraged by covetous and diſorderly perſons, who ſerve their own belly, and not the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, but in which the firſt diſciples abounded, as the ſcriptures declare; nevertheleſs each congregation or incorporated ſociety of chriſtians was

inde-

independent, in which alſo the ſeat of government, and a ſufficient means of perſonal edification was found, under their proper paſtors and guides, in the exerciſe of whoſe different functions the ordinances were duly adminiſtred. This is the denomination which the aſſociated diſciples came under from the beginning, the church; and this is the proper character of chriſtians joined in the order of the goſpel, they are a church, or an aſſembly, called out and gathered from the world; not that the members of this ſacred ſociety can always be together in one place, but the propriety of this appellation is evident in that, as in all bodies corporate, their appearance and operations depend on ſtated and frequent aſſembling themſelves together, which was the daily practice of the ſaints at Jeruſalem; and the forſaking of which, in every age and place, is the firſt ſtep, and an high-way to apoſtacy and ruin, both of communities and particular perſons.

We are now to conſider the increaſe of this church at Jeruſalem. There were continual additions unto it: "added to the church daily." A church is a changeable body, compoſed of individuals who are mutable. Many are the viciſſitudes in providence, by which the members of a particular goſpel-church are removed, and at beſt the perſons who compoſe them, like the prieſts of old, continue not by reaſon of death; beſides, they are liable to be corrupted, in conſequence of which it is too often ſeen, they make ſhipwreck of faith, or behave ſo unworthy their profeſſion, that it is needful to put them away, or to purge them out as old leaven, for the preſervation of the body, the honor

of religion, and the conviction and ſafety of the delinquent himſelf. On theſe, and on other accounts, churches are often diminiſhed, and for want of additions brought very low, yea and in ſome inſtances entirely diſſolve; but the church at Jeruſalem was in a thriving and proſperous condition, the word of God grew exceedingly, and multitudes gladly received it, and joyfully ſubmitted themſelves to the name of Jeſus. They came daily to the apoſtles, and were baptized and added to the Lord. Indeed diſciples were not multiplied every day equal to the number of the firſt gathering, in which the increaſe of one day was three thouſand, yet the goſpel had free courſe into the hearts of many, and brought them to the obedience of faith, inſomuch that every time the diſciples met, at leaſt in general, there were ſome inſtances of the power of God in a viſible ſubjection of ſinners to the Saviour, as their ſovereign and king.

But, who made theſe additions? The hiſtorian declares, "it was the Lord." It is the Lord's doing, and to him it ought to be aſcribed. Miniſters are inſtruments for the conviction and perſuaſion of men, that they may believe and be ſaved; they preach the word of faith, and it pleaſeth God by the fooliſhneſs of preaching to ſave them that believe; but faith is the gift of God. "Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, "but miniſters by whom ye believed, even as the "Lord gave to every man?" 1 Cor. iii. 5. Again; thoſe who are called, being made willing in the day of God's power, freely offer themſelves; and alſo the diſciples with whom they are cemented have their concern

cern in this union, which takes place, as we have ſeen, by mutual conſent. Thus all parties are active towards the addition of perſons to any particular church, after the example efore us. Peter and John preached the word, who, with the aſſiſtance of others, baptized the penitent, and were inſtrumental of joining them to the church; the members of which in reſpect of their reception of them into their body, may be looked upon as adding ſuch perſons, and alſo the party received is concerned in this union, who, on account of his voluntary ſurrender and adherence to Chriſt, is declared in prophecy to have "joined himſelf to the Lord," Iſa. lvi. 3. Nevertheleſs, when a church is increaſed in the number of the faithful, and built up a ſpiritual houſe for divine ſervice, it muſt be ultimately referred to the grace and power of God. Which leads,

FINALLY, to the remaining article in this ſacred account, namely, the peculiar deſcription of thoſe who were joined by the Lord to his people. It is declared that they were "ſuch as ſhould be ſaved." Some would confine the ſenſe of this phraſe to their obtaining the means of ſalvation, but then all who heard the word ſhould have been united to the church, whereas it is manifeſt that ſome only, though a great number, even they only were added, who received the goſpel, and were baptized in the name of Jeſus. The miniſtration of the word is a diſtinguiſhing favor, and wo be to them who neglect or deſpiſe it; and he that is thoughtful about his ſalvation may juſtly encourage himſelf from the enjoyment of the means, in a hope that the Lord will have mercy upon him; for though many indulged

in

in like-manner, periſh in their ſins through unbelief, yet this grant from heaven is a leading ſtep towards the ſalvation of the elect; therefore great is the privilege of a goſpel-miniſtry, and to be highly eſteemed; but it is one thing to be of them to whom the ſalvation of God, i. e. the word of ſalvation is ſent, Acts xxviii. 28. and another thing to be of *ſuch as ſhould be ſaved. The ſaved* is a phraſe which ſtands oppoſed to the *loſt* or the periſhed, to both which the goſpel is evidently preached: It is uſed only in two other places, which may ſerve to illuſtrate the point. In 1 Cor. i. 18. we read, "The "preaching of the croſs is to them that periſh fooliſh-"neſs;" "but (ſays the apoſtle) unto us that are "ſaved it is the power of God." And again, 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. ſpeaking of the acceptance which faithful miniſters find with God, however ſome to whom they preach may treat their report, and receive or reject it, he ſaith, "We are unto God a "ſweet ſavour of Chriſt in them that are ſaved, and in "them that periſh." Now in both theſe paſſages we ſee that the *ſaved* and the *loſt* are oppoſed to each other, and that both the one and the other ſat under the report of the goſpel. It is therefore plain that theſe perſons, of whom it is declared that they are ſuch as ſhould be ſaved, are not thus deſcribed, becauſe they enjoyed the means of ſalvation, but to diſtinguiſh them from thoſe who, notwithſtanding they were thus favored, periſhed in their infidelity. So then, the *loſt*, or them that periſh, are the diſobedient, who, being left to themſelves, perverſely reject the counſel of God; and though they may take up a formal profeſſion of Chriſt, yet having no root in themſelves they fall away

away and come ſhort of the promiſe: and the *ſaved*, in oppoſition to theſe, are ſuch, who, being effectually called, are truly obedient to the faith, and will perſevere unto life everlaſting, being, as it is expreſſed, "not "appointed to wrath, but to obtain ſalvation by "our Lord Jeſus Chriſt," 1 Theſſ. v. 9. This phraſe therefore amounts to the ſame with that uſed of the Gentiles at Antioch, Acts xiii. 48. of whom it is ſaid, "That as many as were ordained to eternal "life believed." Such who ſhall be ſaved are ſuch who are ordained to eternal life, and accordingly obtain like precious faith with God's elect, and having openly ſubmitted themſelves to Jeſus, "are not of them "who draw back unto perdition, but of them who be-"lieve to the ſaving of the ſoul," Heb. x. 39. Theſe are the ſaved, "ſaved and called with an holy calling, "not according to their works, but according to his own "purpoſe and grace, which was given them in Chriſt "Jeſus before the world began," 2 Tim. i. 9. ſuch are "ſaved by grace, through faith, and that not of "themſelves, it is the gift of God," Eph. ii. 8. In a word, ſuch are ſaved, i. e. "being called they are "juſtified by his grace, and made heirs according to "the hope of eternal life," Tit. iii. 7. nor ſhall their "hope make them aſhamed, for whom he juſtified "them he alſo glorified," Rom. viii. 30.

THIS then is the ſum of the account, that the Lord ſo abundantly owned the preaching of the goſpel, and proſpered his church at Jeruſalem, that there were daily additions, not barely of nominal chriſtians, but they were multiplied with the choſen of God, who were

were called according to his purpoſe, being ordained to eternal life: Their increaſe was of ſuch as ſhould be ſaved in the day of the Lord. To be of this number, my Reader, will hereafter be found of infinite importance to each individual, and it is the glory and happineſs of a church to be filled with ſuch members; therefore "give diligence to make thy calling and "election ſure," and let the Lord have no reſt till he thus beautifies the houſe of his glory, "and makes "Jeruſalem a praiſe in the whole earth, an eternal "excellency, and the joy of many generations."

In reflecting on this true and delightful hiſtory of the firſt chriſtians in their communion together, we are led into a view of the following truths:

Note I. That the communion of ſaints is clearly a divine inſtitution. It was under the direction of the apoſtles who received their commiſſion from the Lord, and who were inſpired by the Holy Ghoſt, that the diſciples at firſt were gathered into church-order, and continued ſo to be in every place where the goſpel obtained.

Man by the excellency of his nature, as an intelligent being, is formed for ſociety, and by his relation to others obliged to aſſociate with them; he cannot exert his utmoſt capacity, nor anſwer the end of his exiſtence, or find compleat happineſs, but in a ſocial ſtate; and ſince the end of his being is to glorify God and enjoy him, religious ſociety has been argued from the laws of nature; and it muſt be acknowledged, that church-

fellowſhip

fellowſhip is agreeable to natural light, but the obligation of believers to this ſacred union ariſes from the authority of God in his word, who has directed our worſhip through Jeſus the Mediator, in whoſe name we gather together. Chriſt is king of ſaints, a ſon over his own houſe, and he has not left his people without a plain direction, and a promiſe ſufficient to encourage them in waiting upon him. The motive, form, rule, and end of this fellowſhip depend entirely on his will; nor is it in the power of any man, or ſet of men, to make laws of government or terms of communion, which are not founded in the word of the Lord, but every thing muſt be done as he has ordained, according to the commiſſion he gave his apoſtles, Matt. xxviii. 18. So then a church is not barely a ſociety, nor meerly a ſociety of believers, with a religious view, but a ſociety formed on the order and diſcipline which Chriſt hath appointed; and for the faithful to incorporate and walk together in church-relation, is no indifferent matter, for it is not of human invention, however prudent and uſeful, but an appointment from heaven, as appears from the conduct of theſe primitive chriſtians, under the guidance of their authorized and inſpired leaders, who taught them to obſerve *all* and *only* thoſe things which the Lord had commanded. If the authority of this holy covenant in the Lord was duly conſidered, it would not be ſo generally neglected; for ſince it is of God, certainly every believer is called upon to join himſelf to ſome congregation, on whom he diſcerns the true notes of a goſpel-church, without which no man can diſcharge his duty to Chriſt, to his fellow-chriſtians, or to his own ſoul.

We

We may therefore juſtly lament the growing omiſſion of this divine order. But again,

NOTE II. The proper and authorized members of a chriſtian church, are ſuch only, who, in all appearance, are of them that ſhall be ſaved. Indeed the Lord alone is certainly acquainted with theſe; he only knoweth them that are his, and for wiſe ends permits others to intrude: but they who are in the gall of bitterneſs and bonds of inquity, notwithſtanding they have a notional faith, and are baptized, have no part or lot in this matter. This ſpiritual houſe and holy city muſt be built with holy and ſpiritual perſons, and care ſhould be taken that none but thoſe whoſe calling proves their election of God are admitted into the ſacred ſociety. He that yields not the fruits of evangelical repentance, and a ſound and lively faith in Jeſus, has no claim to a place in his church: An ignorant, ungodly, proud, or ſelf-righteous man may impoſe himſelf on the company, but when the King inſpects thoſe who are at his table, the man who is not inveſted with the wedding-garment, will be turned out with ſhame. That the Lord hath determined that his church in this ſtate of trial ſhould be liable to hypocrites, appears from many ſcriptures, and from the inſtances in which ſome ſuch turn apoſtates, and become roots of bitterneſs, whereby many are troubled and defiled: ſo that while it is meet we ſhould think well of each in our fellowſhip, and pray for him as one of the choſen of God, there is ſtill but little reaſon to expect that none ſhall be added to his viſible church but ſuch as ſhall be ſaved; nevertheleſs the divine decree

cree to permit others to mingle with his ſaints, gives them no right to his ſanctuary, neither will it juſtify his profeſſing people in receiving any into their communion who appear deſtitute of that grace which belongs to the heirs of ſalvation. This privilege of becoming the ſons of God, is given only to them who are born of the Spirit, John i. 12. And we ſhould be careful that lively ſtones are placed in this temple of the moſt High, 1 Pet. ii. 3, 5. And as no other than quickened ſinners are appointed, or authorized to a place in the church of the living God; ſo none but ſuch can anſwer the end of this divine fellowſhip, which is to offer up ſpiritual ſacrifices acceptable to God by Jeſus Chriſt, and to build up one another on their moſt holy faith unto eternal life: But are theſe things poſſible with him that is dead in treſpaſſes and ſin? Can a *carnal* or *natural* man offer up *ſpiritual* ſacrifices? Can he that is in the fleſh, and out of Chriſt, be acceptable to God who is a ſpirit, and who is well-pleaſed alone in his Son? Or, can the dead nouriſh the living? No more can dead ſinners nouriſh that living body the church, but this is eſſential to the end of chriſtian communion. A formal and lifeleſs profeſſion, in itſelf conſidered, avails not to the glory of God, nor to the ſalvation of its ſubject: and however the Lord may render unconverted perſons, who join themſelves to his people, ſubſervient to the purpoſes of his grace, they are utterly incapable of ſpiritual communion, or properly and truly of ſpiritual ſervice, neither will it turn out to their advantage in the end. Beſides, though ſuch are permitted, ſtrictly ſpeaking, they are not added by the Lord. Our Saviour hath ſhewn who it is

that

that ſoweth the bad ſeed: hence tares grow up with the wheat, Matt. xiii. 39. the enemy that ſowed them is the DEVIL. Is an ungodly perſon or hypocrite found in the church? Behold the hand of the Lord hath not planted him there: No, Friend, all his works are according to the counſel of his will. Jeſus is the ſame, he adds none to his people but ſuch as ſhould be ſaved. But then,

NOTE III. The hand of the Lord is in every addition of ſaved and ſpiritual members to his viſible church. It is by him alone a community is inriched with theſe choſen veſſels of mercy: and when one ſuch is added, it may truly be ſaid, 'God gave 'the increaſe.' By his Spirit they are regenerated and quickened for the fellowſhip of his ſaints, as the ſtones were prepared for the temple, they are fitted to his ſpiritual houſe, and by him they are drawn to the obedience of faith. However miniſters and churches, and the ſubjects themſelves, as we have ſeen, are active, and have their voluntary concern in eccleſiaſtical union, it is alone by the will and power of the moſt High that his elect are formed and diſpoſed for his ſervice; and as the arm of his grace is revealed in preparing, ſo the hand of his providence is nearly concerned in fixing one and another in this or that particular church. If the bound of our habitations is fixed, in reſpect of natural and civil life, how much more will our heavenly Father lead his children unto a ſituation in his houſe for the protection and nouriſhment of their ſoul? In ſome inſtances the word and providence of the Lord apparently concur in ſettling his faithful in this ſpiritual relation;

relation; this affords them matter of joy and thankſgiving; but his concern and guidance in this reſpect in every caſe is not to be doubted by thoſe who truſt him, for he is their ſhepherd, who maketh them to "lie down in green paſtures, and leadeth them beſide "the ſtill waters," Pſalm xxiii. 2. Yea, many a child of God hath ſeen reaſon to adore and bleſs him for the leadings of his providence, though by afflicting changes in life, unto a place in his houſe, in which they have found ſweet communion, and reſt for the ſoul. So then, when a church is increaſed by the union of one that is called by grace, and an heir of glory, ſhe may rejoice and ſay, alluding to Rachel's prophecy when Joſeph was born, Gen. xxx. 24. The Lord hath added to me another ſon! And, it may hereafter be the wonder and praiſe of the general aſſembly and the church of the firſt-born, which are written in heaven, to behold the wiſdom and grace of thoſe diſpenſations, whereby the choſen have been diſtributed in Zion on earth. However, each living member in a church is a ſpiritual Joſeph—an addition from the Lord; and happy it is when the diſciples receive one another as Chriſt alſo received his apoſtles, as the gift of the Father; then would the name of the Lord be magnified, and a mutual eſteem prevail among his people, to their unſpeakable honor and advantage! O that it was thus more frequently ſeen! Lord, when wilt thou again pour out the Spirit from on high? when ſhall the houſe of thy glory be filled, and converts come up to thine altar, each one preſenting himſelf a ſacrifice of joy? and when ſhall thy ſaints with admiration and

gratitude ſay, "Who are theſe that fly as a cloud, "and as the doves to their windows?" Once more,

NOTE IV. That additions from the Lord are of great importance to a chriſtian community. An increaſe of ſpiritual and fruitful members, whoſe temper and conduct manifeſt their calling and election of God, are alone from himſelf, and a viſible token of his preſence, which is one characteriſtic of a true goſpel-church. Chriſt walketh in the midſt of the golden candleſticks, Rev. ii. 1. yea and ſaith, "Where two "or three are gathered together in my name, there I "am in the midſt of them," Matt. xviii. 20. The Papiſts vainly boaſt in their number, and proudly ſtile themſelves *catholic*, as if their profeſſion was univerſal, which, bleſſed be God, is far from being true; but numbers are not the note of a church. The true church is exceeded in number by the world in general, and in ſome periods by antichriſt in particular, ſo that there can be no dependence on meer popularity; but this is certain, that the Lord is preſent with his people; and, ſince his adding unto them is one proof that he is with them, though he hath other kind of manifeſtations of his preſence to ſatisfy his ſaints, when for a ſeaſon an increaſe is ſuſpended, theſe additions are to be prayed for. Beſides, the church's edification depends on the Lord's adding ſuch to her number. Formal profeſſors may be an occaſional advantage, but properly ſpeaking, this ſpiritual houſe is built up by them that are alive unto God, Eph. iv. 15, 16. They are ſuch who "grow up into him in all things, which "is

" is the head, even Chriſt; from whom the whole " body fitly joined together, and compacted by that " which every joint ſupplieth, according to the effec- " tual working in the meaſure of every part, maketh " increaſe of the body, unto the edifying itſelf in " love." From this fine deſcription of the myſtical body of Chriſt, it appears that a particular church is conducive unto the edification of his real members, in proportion to the number and vigor of them who are vitally in him; the leaſt of whom are of advantage in his grace, prayers, ſpiritual affection, and gifts, and may be helpful to the greateſt particular member, and the body in general, for "the head ſhall not ſay to the " feet, I have no need of thee," 1 Cor. xii. 21. Theſe additions are therefore much to be deſired, ſeeing no ſpiritual fruit can proceed from natural men, but the increaſe of them who are in Chriſt Jeſus, will add to the life and beauty of a church. And further, the importance of having ſuch added will appear, if we conſider that without this a goſpel church-ſtate cannot exiſt, but muſt ſoon be broke up. As hinted already, it is meet to think well of all who profeſs the goſpel of Chriſt, and who do not by their unworthy behaviour lay themſelves under ſuſpicion; neverthleſs there is but too much reaſon to conclude, that in every church there may be ſome who are not of the choſen and faithful; nor would I pronounce it impoſſible that vital religion may be ſo ſunk in a chriſtian ſociety, that her members in general may be no better than formal profeſſors. God forbid! but I apprehend this may be the caſe; yet conſidering the end of this divine fellow-ſhip, it ſeems unreaſonable to call that ſociety a church

of Chriſt in which not one true chriſtian remains; but this may, yea it muſt be the caſe with a nominal church through the viciſſitudes of providence in this mortal ſtate, and that in a very few years, if the Lord doth not add ſome real diſciples. So then this ſpiritual building, like all other ſtructures on earth, and even the world itſelf, for reaſons mentioned before, is ſubject to decay, and would fall into ruin, unleſs repaired by the hand of the Lord. It appears from 2 Pet. iii 9. that the world itſelf is ſuffered to continue for the ſake of the choſen, that they may be ſaved, through the knowledge of the truth. By the reaſoning of the apoſtle in that place, when the number of the elect are accompliſhed, the conflagration will immediately enſue, and the univerſe diſſolve in the devouring flames of that fire, in which the Judge ſhall be revealed from heaven. In like manner, a particular church is maintained for the communion and edification of the ſaints; and ſince the purpoſe of divine wiſdom and grace can be no longer anſwered in a ſociety who are utterly deſtitute of living members, or hath no one quickened by grace left among them, what reaſon is there to hope for their continuance as a people? But if any are otherwiſe minded, of this we are certain, that if ſuch a community could be pointed out, ſhe would be no chriſtian church, but on the contrary of the ſynagogue of ſatan; a company of hypocrites and impoſters under a ſacred profeſſion! So then it amounts to the ſame, whether a ſociety may or may not ſtand under this form. Additions from the Lord of his ſaved-ones is needful to the continuance of a true goſpel-church, and therefore of the utmoſt importance.

THESE

THESE are the particular doctrines that reſult from this ſacred hiſtory of the firſt diſciples, and which ſtand confirmed by the cloſing ſentence of the evangeliſt's account; than which no part is more intereſting and pleaſing. The fellowſhip of ſaints is an ordinance of God, that the called only, who are ſuch as ſhall be ſaved, are meet for, or entitled to this divine privilege, that theſe are added by the Lord, and that the addition of ſuch by him is needful to the character, edification, and continuance of a true goſpel-church.

IT follows that a chriſtian church is a ſociety diſtinct from the world. Thus ſhe is deſcribed by her Lord, Cant. iv. 12. "A garden encloſed is my ſiſter, "my ſpouſe, a ſpring ſhut up, a fountain ſealed." Nothing can be more contrary to the nature of a goſpel-church than a ſociety laid open and common. It is further evident, that in a particular viſible church alone, encloſed as the Lord hath directed, the ſeat of government is found. Indeed, through the careleſs habit of profeſſors, diſcipline may decline under any form of chriſtian communion; and truly there ſeems now little reaſon for boaſting in the order of many who ſeparate from national eſtabliſhments, which is not to their praiſe; but it has been found, by ſorrowful experience, that a godly diſcipline cannot be maintained in an open church-ſtate, the want of which is to this day juſtly lamented by thoſe who fear God of every denomination. It likewiſe appears from theſe premiſes, that in taking up this fellowſhip a perſon joins himſelf to the church; and the relation which reſults from this

union to any miniſter or particular perſon depends on his connexion with the body; and alſo that every thing done or ſuffered in this order, is an act of obedience to the Lord, in whom the chriſtian rejoiceth under the fruition of his privileges in the houſe of God. A due conſideration of theſe points would check the prevailing fondneſs of popular conſtitutions, and reclaim many from the diſorders they indulge, which betrays an ignorance of the nature, and ſubverts the deſign of this ſacred inſtitution.

And here again let me intreat the Reader to conſider, ſince this is the appointment of heaven, who can deny the propriety and obligation of every believer to ſubmit to his Lord, and to walk before him in union with his people. If the communion of ſaints was no more than a lawful and prudent aſſociation, adapted to the honor of God, and their mutual advantage, would it be any inſtance of piety, wiſdom or goodneſs, to deſpiſe or neglect it? But, ſeeing it as a divine inſtitution, muſt not the conſcience of every chriſtian dictate his obedience? The great Dr. Owen lays it down as an allowed maxim, and I ſee no exception, 'that every 'believer is bound, by virtue of poſitive precepts, to 'join himſelf to ſome ſuch ſingle congregation, hav-'ing the proper marks of a true church of Chriſt.' All reputable and orderly perſons, however they may differ in their opinions about particular forms, agree in this: That the diſciples of the Redeemer are bound to his ordinances, without delay or exception; nor will any refuſe it who ſeriouſly ponder the commiſſion given by our Lord to his apoſtles, to baptize in his name,

and

and teach thoſe who have been baptized to obſerve all things whatſoever he hath commanded them; yet how many linger and ſcruple to the end of their days, and thereby loſe the opportunity for bearing their teſtimony to the name of Jeſus in the world!

To this ſacred fellowſhip every ſaint ſhould be admitted on a credible teſtimony of his repentance. And here it is proper to conſider in what way it becomes a believer to teſtify his faith to the ſatisfaction of the church. The propriety of chriſtians being fully perſuaded of a meetneſs in thoſe whom they receive into communion, as obſerved in a preceeding lecture ‡, is ſo obvious that it will ſcarce be diſputed; the queſtion is, in what form this ſatisfaction ought to be given? Far be it to inſiſt on terms of communion not preſcribed by our Lord, and for which we have not the example of his inſpired apoſtles! But my opinion on this article of ſocial religion, in favor of an ancient cuſtom too much neglected, will, I hope, be received with candor; and that if my Reader is convinced that it correſponds with the ſcripture, and the nature of that divine fellowſhip on which we are diſcourſing, he will not deſpiſe it.

And here I truly acknowledge that this teſtimony may be given in writing, or even by ſigns only *;

‡ Page 168.

* An inſtance of which not long ſince turned out, in the caſe of a young man born deaf and dumb, but whoſe heart the Lord opened, in conſequence of which he was enabled by ſigns to give full ſatisfaction to the church meeting in the Pithey, Briſtol, and continues an honorable member of the ſame.

the ſenſe of hearing, and the faculty of ſpeech, are not eſſential to the obtaining of faith; and no believer who can by any poſſible method convey an idea of his converſion, and a deſire of walking in goſpel-order, whoſe behaviour bears witneſs to the ſincerity of his profeſſion, which is ever to be regarded; I ſay, no ſuch perſon is to be refuſed the ordinances of Chriſt, on any conſideration whatever; nevertheleſs, a ſolemn, expreſs and verbal declaration of faith in Chriſt, and the power of his grace in effectual calling, appears to be natural and ſcriptural, and likewiſe agreeable to the practice of the faithful in all ages when the ſpirit of religion prevailed. See Iſa. xliv. 5. A profeſſion of faith is univerſally approved †. One ſhall ſay, I am the Lord's. The term ὁμολογίας uſed for this chriſtian profeſſion, throughout the New-Teſtament, carries in it an open and frank acknowledgment of any perſon or thing as our own; and what is the chriſtian profeſſion but an acknowledgment of Chriſt as the Son of God, and our dependence upon and devotion to him as our Saviour and Lord? This no doubt is to be done by particular acts of obedience to his declared will, and by an habitual courſe of external conduct, whereby, having put on his name, we bear a conſtant witneſs to his authority and grace; but he that looks to Chriſt for ſalvation,

† The Pædobaptiſt Diſſenters, yea and even the Church of England itſelf, are not without ſome teſtimony to this; the latter require a perſon to rehearſe the commandments, creed and Lord's-prayer, and likewiſe to anſwer the queſtions in the catechiſm, antecedent to his being confirmed, without which he cannot be regularly admitted to the table of the Lord, which is eſſential to a full communion of ſaints; and, what leſs is this than a verbal confeſſion of faith?

tion, and is brought to this obedience of faith, has a reaſon for his hope, and ſhould be ready to give it; which is neither more or leſs, in other words, than his experience of the power of God diſplayed in enlightening his mind, convincing him of ſin, engaging his heart to truſt in the Meſſiah; and why ſhould the man that has obtained this mercy make a difficulty of declaring it to the faithful, or even to an infidel, if required? But it ſhould be conſidered, that a confeſſion or verbal declaration is an eſſential and leading idea in that profeſſion which the goſpel requires; and accordingly Chriſt Jeſus is ſaid, in 1 Tim. vi. 13. "to have "witneſſed a good confeſſion before Pontius Pilate." And this we know was an open and free declaration of his character, John xviii. 38. where the ſame word is uſed: "Beloved, Chriſt is highly exalted, and hath a name "above every name, that every knee ſhould bow, and "that every tongue ſhould confeſs unto him." A man may talk of his faith in Chriſt in a looſe and general way, which comes not up to a ſolemn reverend confeſſion of his name; or, after having made a confeſſion, he may be tempted to neglect his ordinances, and ſo fall ſhort of the engagements he is under; but bowing the knee is a diſtinct mode of worſhip from that of confeſſing with the tongue. They are neither to be confounded nor ſeparated in goſpel-obedience, which demands the ſacrifice of the lips in a confeſſion of Jeſus; and though ſome will ſubſtitute the hand inſtead of the tongue in this branch of duty to the Saviour, they may as ſoon prove that theſe different members of the natural body are one and the ſame, as that there is no eſſential difference in the manner of writing or ſpeaking,

ſpeaking, or that the Holy Ghoſt intended the former when he expreſſes the latter.

Our Lord inſiſts on our confeſſing him before men on earth, Matt. x. 32. where it is urged from a conſideration that one might expect ſhould awaken every chriſtian to ſhun the appearance of evading the point. The Phariſees are condemned for not confeſſing Chriſt, John xii. 42. And it appears from the inſtance of the eunuch, and others, that the firſt ſtep in a chriſtian profeſſion, is to declare our knowledge of Jeſus, and faith in him as the ſon of God. And to the ſame purpoſe we read, Rom. x. 9, 10. "that with the heart "man believeth unto righteouſneſs, and with the "mouth confeſſion is made to ſalvation." A man's own lips is the proper and natural inſtrument of confeſſion; and indeed to introduce any practice under a notion of confeſſing where the mouth is not uſed, appears to me no leſs prepoſterous than unſcriptural. In a word, a fair and cloſe reaſoning out of the ſcripture, we ſhall find that a verbal acknowledgment is included in that profeſſion of the name of Jeſus, under which the primitive diſciples were found; and therefore I cannot but think it incumbent on every believer in Chriſt, and am ſorry that it ſhould be even diſpenſed with, much more diſcouraged, where it may be obtained. There is nothing in a ſerious and humble declaration of a perſon's experience in the church of God but what is decent and honorable, or to offend the moſt tender and modeſt conſtitution. Nor doth it appear that the laying it aſide has increaſed the number of thoſe who join in communion; on the contrary, church-fellowſhip

ſhip among nominal chriſtians never was more neglected than in the preſent day, ſo that it is much to be wiſhed that we returned to the good old way pointed out by reaſon and ſcripture, and that the faithful were encouraged to ſay with David, "Come and hear, all "ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath "done for my ſoul," Pſalm lxvi. 16.

FINALLY; ſince it is plain that the communion of ſaints is of divine inſtitution, and that from the beginning the called were joined by the Lord to the church, have we not reaſon to conclude that this is the general method of God with his people? The pious Mr. Henry, in his remark on this verſe, has the following note: 'Thoſe, ſaith he, that God hath deſigned for eternal 'ſalvation, ſhall one time or another be effectually 'brought to Chriſt; and thoſe that are brought to 'Chriſt are added to the church in a holy covenant 'by baptiſm, and in a holy communion by other ordi-'nances.' This indeed is to be taken in a qualified ſenſe, but may it not juſtly be inferred from this account, and from the general report of the goſpel, "He "that believeth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved;" that this is the high-way to heaven, and that, at leaſt under the goſpel-diſpenſation, however there may be exceptions, for the grace of God is not to be limited otherwiſe than according to the revealed counſel of heaven, for the moſt part, ſuch who ſhall be ſaved will hereafter appear to have been added to the church? A conſideration that ſhould awaken all who live in the neglect of this fellowſhip, to examine into the ground

of

of that hope, which is not effectual to bring them under this pleaſant yoke of their Redeemer.

On a review of this authentic and intereſting hiſtory of the primitive church, who can but ſee, and be charmed with her beauty! How lovely is her countenance in her infant ſtate, when a conſtant and faithful ſpirit univerſally prevailed! With what unity, zeal, brotherly love, hoſpitality, honor and ſucceſs, did ſhe appear in her aſſemblies, daily increaſing and flouriſhing out, ſtill more and more, from the boſom of her Lord, who was continually ſaluting her with the tokens of his power and love, and cauſing her members to "ſuck and be ſatisfied, and to milk out and be de-"lighted with the abundance of her glory!" O that it was with us as in theſe days and months, when Zion was a crown of glory in the hand of her Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of her God! Thanks be to God, he will never forſake his people. There are daily additions to his church, and we have reaſon to hope that they are of ſuch as ſhall be ſaved; yet, is there no cauſe to bewail the preſent ſtate of the viſible kingdom of Chriſt, and the melancholy difference when compared with what we have ſeen? How unſtable, corrupt, divided, and lukewarm! how covetous, looſe and unprofitable; yea, and in many inſtances, how uncharitable are profeſſors in their behaviour one toward another, inſomuch that in ſome places there is need for applying the caution, Gal. v. 13. "But if ye bite "and devour one another, take heed that ye be not "conſumed one of another." For theſe things let us humble

humble ourſelves, and ſeek for the return of the Spirit, who is grieved by this ſad diſpoſition and conduct; but he waits to be gracious, and will heal our backſl dings if we return unto him. Remember, Beloved, the connexion there is between a lively, faithful, ſpiritual and fruitful behaviour, and the divine preſence and bleſſing. The wind bloweth where it liſteth; ſo is the work of the Spirit, among a profeſſing people, his operations are according to the good pleaſure of his will, but he works by the appointed means of grace. Order, harmony and zeal in a church are needful to warrant an expectation of its increaſe; ſo that when this is abſent the aſpect is threatening. Nor let it be forgot that the deſign of our fellowſhip in Chriſt is nothing ſhort of eternal ſalvation. This is the end of our faith. With this view the Lord adds his choſen to the church, namely, that they ſhould be ſaved; and this ſhould be the aim and endeavour of his miniſters and people in communion. May this therefore be our earneſt purſuit under a profeſſion of his name, that we may together appear with our Redeemer in glory at his coming!

And now, my dear Reader, I finiſh this lecture and ſubject with an earneſt intreaty that thou wouldſt carefully ſurvey and ponder the whole ſcene of tranſactions repreſented in the foregoing pages. What ſober unprejudiced perſon can reflect on theſe things without admiration and praiſe! How conſpicuous the ſovereign love, wiſdom, grace, power and faithfulneſs of God, in ſending his Son to die and ſave ſinners, as he ſpake by the mouth of his prophets from the foundation of the world; and in ſealing his miſſion and character

character by ſo great a variety and number of miracles, unbelievers themſelves being judges! And, how hardened their hearts, who reject the Redeemer, or neglect his ſalvation! Behold and be aſtoniſhed: His reſurrection from the dead; and conſider the ample ſatisfaction, by undeniable witneſſes of a fact equally intereſting and glorious, whoſe teſtimony is confirmed by the Spirit of truth! How amazing the methods of grace, that reigns through righteouſneſs to the pardon and life of the moſt flagrant tranſgreſſors, who repent; not excluding the murderers of Jeſus himſelf; but that "in his name remiſſion of ſins ſhould be preached to "all nations, beginning at Jeruſalem." Yea, and that ſo great a multitude of theſe blood-guilty wretches ſhould be converted in a day, and obtain a pardon from him, whom, but a few weeks before, they had unjuſtly condemned, and, by the hands of the wicked, crucified and ſlain! And finally, that the faithful ſhould be called into a fellowſhip ſo adapted to the honor of their Saviour, their mutual advantage, and the continuance of the goſpel to the end of the world, is greatly to be admired! Who that attends to this wonderful diſpenſation of mercy from an holy God to ſinful men, can forbear to cry out with the apoſtle, "O the depth "of the riches both of the wiſdom and knowledge of "God: How unſearchable are his judgments, and his "ways paſt finding out!"

If theſe things are certainly true, as doubtleſs they are, then the goſpel is true, and wo be to them who deſpiſe it. It is highly unreaſonable to queſtion theſe facts, ſince it is not credible that the apoſtles would have

have openly appealed to the inhabitants of Jeruſalem concerning theſe things if they had been falſe, or that ſuch preſumprion and folly ſhould not have immediately met with its reward, to their ruin; and ſtill more incredible, yea it was even impoſſible, on a ſuppoſition of any imp ſture or deceit, that a few plain perſons, whoſe ſimplicity and moral behaviour was never diſputed; without learning, riches, power, or any other weapons, than reaſoning out of the ſcriptures, compared with the external evidence given from heaven to the doctrine they preached, ſhould perſuade ſo great a multitude, who lived on the ſpot where Jeſus was crucified, to become followers of him, through a ſcene of ſufferings and ſelf denial. In a word, had there been the leaſt heſitation concerning the facts referred to by Peter in his diſcourſe, and on which the apoſtles proceeded in their miniſtry, chriſtianity muſt have been cruſhed on its firſt appearance, and its votaries ſcattered with ſhame and juſt indignation: But ſince the contrary is evident, how daring and perverſe is the oppoſition of deiſts who openly contradict and blaſpheme the name of Jeſus, and the revelation of his grace! And indeed ſince Jeſus is the Meſſiah, and there can be ſalvation in no other, how unhappy and dangerous the ſtate of all unbelievers! If theſe papers fall into the hands of ſuch who neglect or deſpiſe the true grace of God, and prove a means of convincing any one of them, the name of the Lord will be praiſed, and I ſhall have joy in the day of revelation. However, this attempt is humbly committed to his bleſſing, in hope of its finding ſome acceptance in the heart of the true

chriſtian

chriſtian Reader; and with reſpect to thoſe who are yet diſobedient, I know of nothing more ſuitable than the exhortation of the prophet, Pſalm ii. 12, with which I conclude: "Kiſs the ſon leſt he be angry, "and ye periſh from the way, when his wrath is "kindled but a little: Bleſſed are all they that put "their truſt in him."

The End of PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.

A DIS-

A

DISSERTATION

ON THE

EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH AT SARDIS,

FOR

The Warning of thoſe who are fallen into the like threatning State of Religion.

BOOK V.

The early declenſion of the church from her original ſimplicity.

LECTURE XXI.

Introduction. The Lord's teſtimony againſt the diſciples at Sardis. In what reſpects a church may be dead, notwithſtanding ſhe hath a name that ſhe liveth. The occaſions and ſymptoms of this dreadful ſtate. Motives to watch againſt it.

THAT the church ſoon declined from her primitive purity, order and zeal, is notorious, and a ſubject more needful than pleaſing. On the ſpread of chriſtianity tares grew up with the wheat, inſomuch that the worſt of errors and moſt ſhameful apoſtacies appeared, even in the days of the apoſtles; this their

writings in general ſhew, but no where more plainly than in the epiſtles to the ſeven churches in Aſia, contained in the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt by his angel to his ſervant John the evangeliſt. Some writers of note have ſhunned an explanation of this myſterious book, as though an attempt of this kind was preſumptuous and vain; on the contrary, ſome others, no leſs eminent for piety and learning, ſeem to have ventured too far and miſcarried: Time hath ſhewn them greatly miſtaken in what, like prophets, they have been bold to aſſert, concerning the accompliſhment of its ſeveral predictions. This temerity ſhould warn us againſt intruding into things not mentioned in ſcripture, but it is no reaſon for laying aſide the ſtudy of a divine prophecy, unto which we are encouraged with an aſſurance of a bleſſing, chap. i. 3.

THERE are thoſe who contend that theſe epiſtles are prophetical of the viſible church in different periods, ſucceeding each other to the end of time, and ſome go about to aſſign them preciſely, to which others make conſiderable objections; but it anſwers my preſent deſign that it is generally allowed that a chriſtian church did really exiſt in each city mentioned, and that theſe churches were actually in the circumſtances ſeverally deſcribed at the time the apoſtle John wrote, for he is expreſly directed to write the things which *are*, as well as thoſe which *ſhall be hereafter*, chap. i. 19. So that, if a myſtical ſenſe may be admitted, a literal one cannot be refuſed. The facts then related of theſe churches are doubtleſs hiſtorically true, and the exhortations,

tations, promiſes and threatnings, and likewiſe the reproofs and commendations, are of univerſal inſtruction. Indeed there are ſome articles in every epiſtle peculiar to the community unto whom it is ſent, but we learn from the cloſe of each, that what is ſaid to one is ſpoken to all, and therefore the contents are to be applied to the churches of Chriſt under ſimilar circumſtances, in every age, to the end of the world.

THE preſent ſtate of religion, which is juſtly lamented, ſeems much to reſemble that which appeared in the church at Sardis, which is the ſubject I have choſen, and accordingly ſome who take it prophetically apply it to the period we are in; if their notion is juſt, the epiſtle to her very nearly concerns us, and demands our moſt ſerious attention; however, on compariſon, the likeneſs is but too viſible, ſo that a diſſertation upon it cannot be unſeaſonable.

THE plan of theſe epiſtles is uniform. After an order to write, they are each directed to the angel or miniſter of the church from Jeſu Chriſt, whom the apoſtle at large in a viſion, as deſcribed chap. i. and from which deſcription this divine ſpeaker aſſumes ſome diſtinguiſhing character adapted to the peculiar ſtate of the community, which being laid open, with proper rebukes and exhortations for the awakening of backſliders and comforting the faithful, is followed with a gracious promiſe unto him that perſeveres, and a ſolemn excitation to hearken to the voice of the Spirit.

CONFORMABLE to this plan our epiſtle to Sardis runs thus:

1. "UNTO the angel of the church in Sardis write: "Theſe things ſaith he that hath the ſeven ſpirits of "God, and the ſeven ſtars: I know thy works, that "thou haſt a name that thou liveſt, and art dead.

2. "BE watchful, and ſtrengthen the things which "remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found "thy works perfect before God.

3. "REMEMBER therefore how thou haſt received "and heard, and hold faſt, and repent. If therefore "thou ſhalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, "and thou ſhalt not know what hour I will come up-"on thee.

4. "THOU haſt a few names even in Sardis, which "have not defiled their garments; and they ſhall walk "with me in white: for they are worthy.

5. "HE that overcometh, the ſame ſhall be clothed "in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name "out of the book of life, but I will confeſs his name "before my Father, and before his angels.

6. "HE that hath an ear, let him hear what the "Spirit ſaith unto the churches."

I SHALL

I SHALL endeavour to open and apply this divine meſſage from Jeſus to his people, in a lecture on each verſe, in the order it ſtands; the firſt of which contains the following particulars, namely, the direction of the epiſtle, the character which our Lord aſſumes, and his account of their ſhameful and dangerous ſtate.

THE ſuperſcription runs: "Unto the angel of the "church in Sardis." Sardis was the metropolis of Lydia in Aſia minor, formerly an important city of great magnificence, where the celebrated Cræſus once kept his court, but it is long ſince reduced, there being now only a village of this name a ſmall diſtance from the ruins of the former, which ſome think was the ſeat of this chriſtian church; but all theſe churches were ſituate in capital cities, and there is no reaſon to queſtion but that Sardis was famous in the apoſtles time. A popular and opulent city, the riches and luxury of which might be one occaſion of the ſad declenſions complained of, for experience ſhews that the buſineſs and pleaſures which abound in ſuch places are often deſtructive of vital religion; however, unto the angel or miniſter of the church, as it is explained chap. i. 20. this epiſtle is directed; not that it concerned him only or principally, he might be to blame; ſometimes a miniſter is tempted by the perverſeneſs and ill-treatment he meets with on account of his faithful reproofs, to let men alone in their folly, or he might be fallen into the ſame carnal frame which prevailed in the church; or if choſen into office ſince ſhe declined, no wonder that

his ſpirit and conduct was conformed unto theirs, for in a ſtate of lukewarmneſs people naturally ſeek out for one like themſelves, whoſe miniſtration and conduct ſhall give them no diſturbance in their diſorderly walk, and there are but too many in every age who are ready for their purpoſe; hence the old proverb, 'Like peo-'ple, like prieſt.' Be this as it may, the paſtor or elder is not charged with neglect of his duty. The letter is directed to him as her principal officer for the church, and manifeſtly concerns every member who is commended or reproved, and exhorted with a promiſe or threatning, according to his integrity or defect, in whatever ſtation or character he ſtood.

To engage their attention the divine Jeſus preſcribes himſelf in terms under which he appears in a grand and moſt important light: "Theſe things ſaith he that hath "the ſeven ſpirits and the ſeven ſtars." They are not the dictate of any creature, however dignified in nature or office, but of the great Son of man, who is the Alpha and Omega, the true God and eternal life, the exalted Head of the church, who, being alive from the dead, hath all power in heaven and earth. "He "that hath the ſeven ſpirits of God;" under whom not only the angels of heaven miniſter to the heirs of ſalvation, but the Spirit himſelf proceedeth, the fulneſs and variety of whoſe gifts and graces are diſpenſed in Chriſt Jeſus; yea, and the ſeven ſtars, thoſe angels in office, or miniſters of the word, who are appointed to edify the church, theſe are all in his hand, to be continued or removed at his pleaſure. This character of the Saviour hath a twofold aſpect; it carries in it a threat-

threatning if they remained diſobedient, and a promiſe of his bleſſing in caſe of repentance, unto which they are called; q. d. 'O ye, the miniſter and people in 'my church at Sardis, unto whom I now ſend, conſi-'der who it is that ſaith theſe things unto you; it is 'he that hath the diſpoſing of all ſpiritual gifts and 'graces, means and inſtruments, whereby you can 'flouriſh or even exiſt: If you hearken not to me, or 'deſpiſe my counſel, remember I am he, at whoſe in-'ſtance the Spirit of life and grace withdraws, and the 'ſtars diſappear, in conſequence of which churches 'decay, and at length entirely diſſolve; on the other 'hand, if you take warning and repent, under a ſenſe 'of your backſlidings, behold I am ready to furniſh 'you with every needful ſupply for the continuance of 'my goſpel with ſucceſs among you, that you may re-'vive, and that your beauty be reſtored to the glory 'of my name.' And now who cannot ſee the pro-priety of this introduction to the reproofs and exhorta-tions which follow? Could any thing be more adapted to awaken them out of that ſtate of ſupineneſs and ne-gligence into which they were ſunk, and to encourage their return to the Lord?

MANY are the works to be performed in a church-ſtate, to a due diſcharge of which it is needful that each member fills up his ſtation, according to the meaſure of grace he hath obtained. The work or buſineſs of a church is to maintain the doctrines and orders of the goſpel in their ſimplicity and glory, to hold forth the word of life, for the converſion of ſinners and the edifi-cation of ſaints, to oppoſe ſatan and his kingdom, and

to promote the knowledge of Chriſt, and cheriſh the members of his body, to the utmoſt of their power; this requires that diligence and an expence of mind and body, which a ſlothful or ſelfiſh profeſſor will not exert. By this labour and ſelf-denial frequent aſſemblies are to be held for preaching the word, adminiſtring the ordinances, ſtriving together in prayers, an holy watch over one another in the Lord, and all works of charity, ſuch as brotherly admonition, viſiting the ſick, and relieving the poor, with every office of kindneſs as occaſion requires, in which the ſaints are to abound in love to God and each other. All theſe works are required in a church; to be zealous in which becomes the diſciples of Jeſus, though they ſeem little regarded by ſome who paſs under that name, but every community is eſtabliſhed in proportion to her diligence and faithfulneſs in theſe things which are in a degree eſſential to the form of a community, and accordingly that at Sardis had her works, the knowledge of which is the firſt thing aſſerted, "I know thy works." It is a perfect knowledge which Chriſt here aſſumes, ſuch as men obtain of an object within the compaſs of their underſtanding after the moſt careful inſpection, and accordingly he declares, "I have not found thy works "perfect, &c." Thus he whoſe eyes are as a flaming fire, diſcerning the thoughts of the heart, declares his exact and univerſal acquaintance with the works of his church, which ſhews that his eye is upon the ways of profeſſors who come ſhort of their duty, how little ſoever they think of it, and that his judgment is according to truth. What Chriſt ſays againſt a people he ſays not on the report of others, but on his own know-

knowledge, and the facts are not to be diſputed; he is himſelf a witneſs againſt thoſe he condemns, therefore wo be to them who will not repent.

Now what report doth the omniſcient Jeſus give of the ſtate of this church? No doubt a juſt, but alas it is a melancholy account! This is the teſtimony he bears againſt her: He declares it to her face, "that thou "haſt a name that thou liveſt, and art dead." 'This 'is thine appearance and character; thou wouldeſt 'ſeem a church of the living God, in whom he is 'worſhipped in ſimplicity and truth, and haſt a name 'that thou thus liveſt; but this character which thou 'beareſt is falſe, I know thy works; and this is thy 'true but ſhameful condition, thou art in reality dead.' Thus the church at Sardis ſtands charged by the holy Jeſus himſelf.

But was ſhe abſolutely and totally without any life? Certainly no; ſhe was yet alive, her church-ſtate exiſted, nor had ſhe, as hinted already, wholly ceaſed from her works; ſome things remain, though they are ready to die; theſe ſhe is exhorted to ſtrengthen. Indeed the gen rality of her members ſeem very defective, and it is probable many of them were hypocrites, nevertheleſs there were a few names in Sardis of a different character, as will hereafter appear; and while any who live unto God, and hold their integrity, remain in a church, though their number are few, and they are incapable of withſtanding the tide of corruption, it cannot be ſaid that ſhe is totally dead. This charge muſt therefore be taken in a qualified

fied ſenſe; our Lord plainly intends that ſhe was comparatively dead, i. e. liteleſs, unprofitable, and very imperfect; dead in compariſon of what is required; her vigour and fruitfulneſs fell ſhort of what ſhe profeſſed and the character ſhe bore, and, in a word, that ſhe was ſadly declined from her primitive zeal and faithfulneſs, and that, under theſe circumſtances, ſhe was in a dying condition, and if ſhe did not repent, would certainly come to a ſpeedy diſſolution. This, I ſay, was the ſhameful and dangerous ſtate of the community referred to, and to the like ſad condition the moſt famous churches are liable, and are for the moſt part reduced before they diſſolve. What appearances we have of a ſimilar declenſion in the preſent day, I ſhall not here ſtay to enquire, but that we may be warned and improved by this affecting example, I propoſe briefly to conſider in what reſpect a church may have a name to live and yet be dead, ſhew whence it is that a chriſtian community, although dead in the ſenſe of our text, may nevertheleſs have a name that ſhe liveth, point out the ſymptoms of this ſtate of things, and then offer ſome motives to be watchful againſt it.

And firſt, a church may have the character of being ſound in the faith and zealous for the doctrines of grace, and yet be ſo far degenerated as that on examination it will be found, that thoſe in her communion have no juſt regard for them, or it may be are fond of vain notions which directly oppoſe them. Thus in ſeveral of the Aſian churches, who are ſtiled golden candleſticks, as in Pergamos and Thyatria, the hateful

hateful doctrines of Balaam, the Nicolations, and the ſubtleties of Jezebel, were connived at; doctrines which tended to idolatry and uncleanneſs; and if, as ſome think, theſe are typical of Rome, her abominations are notorious; ſhe aſſumes the name of the apoſtolic church, but is far from being ſtedfaſt in the doctrine of Chriſt, for ſhe is not built on the foundation of the apoſtles and prophets, of which Chriſt Jeſus is the corner-ſtone; her foundation is not in the ſcripture, but in human traditions, ſo that her tenets are beſide the authority of God, whoſe precept in many inſtances ſhe diſannulleth, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, and particularly in the article of juſtification; human merit, and the works of the ſinner, are made a cauſe of his acceptance with God, and a title to life, againſt all reaſon and ſcripture, for, ſince "we are altogether as an unclean thing," moſt certain it is that "all our righteouſneſſes are as filthy "rags," Iſa. lxiv. 6. And the goſpel-doctrine in this point makes the obedience of Chriſt and his perfect righteouſneſs, imputed and received by faith, the ſole ground of glory in the ſight of God, declaring that believers are "juſtified freely by his grace, through the "redemption which is in Chriſt Jeſus," Tit. iii. 7. But if, as hinted, the Sardinian church-ſtate under her declenſions was a figure of the reformed churches, who cannot ſee too great a likeneſs? The very name of a Proteſtant is oppoſed to the doctrines of Rome, and thoſe of the reformation were levelled directly againſt that root of all popiſh inventions 'the merit of works,' but alas how are many Proteſtants, both at home and abroad, ſwerved from the true grace of God! Thoſe

precious

precious truths, by which, through the power and bleſſing of the Almighty, antichriſt was expelled, and this and other nations were reſcued from popiſh ſuperſtition and tyranny, are now ſet at nought, and in a manner univerſally denied! May not a church be ſaid to have a name that ſhe liveth and at the ſame time is dead in reſpect of her doctrine, when her public confeſſion and ſworn articles are full and ſtrong, for inſtance, for the Holy Trinity, the Deity and ſatisfaction of Chriſt, the deplorable ſtate of man who is born under the guilt and dominion of ſin, his total impotence in himſelf, and the neceſſity of the regeneration of the Spirit, together with juſtification alone by the merits of the Redeemer, and at the ſame time the generality of her miniſters and members contradict theſe great and important truths of revelation, and to their utmoſt promote a ſet of notions in direct oppoſition unto them? And need we go far for an inſtance ſo amazingly perverſe and affecting? Nor is this confined to any particular denomination of Proteſtants. It is ſad to relate, but even among Proteſtant Diſſenters, whoſe ſeparation from the public hath a form of zeal for the purity of the goſpel, it is notorious that there are ſome even among them moſt ſhamefully corrupted with the leaven of thoſe who ſubvert the truth as it is in Jeſus, inſomuch that in all appearance they have ſcarce any thing of the goſpel of Chriſt to be found with them.

AGAIN; this may be the caſe with a church in reſpect of her diſcipline. It belongs to a church to watch over the life of her members, and to warn them of errors in doctrine and practice, to admoniſh them that

that go aſtray, to cenſure the diſorderly, and if required, as in caſe of perverſeneſs, to put the offender away; and this is ſo reaſonable in itſelf, and ſo plainly revealed, that no one denies it. Indeed it is needful to the purity and preſervation of every corporate body to exerciſe diſcipline, the objects, manner, and end of which, in a chriſtian community, are deſcribed in the word, with many exhortations to be faithful in this truſt, yet alas it is but too much neglected even among thoſe who ſeparate from others under a pretence of a conſcientious regard to the authority of the Lord in the order of his houſe. At Thyatira they are condemned for ſuffering that woman Jezebel, and in Corinth the diſciples are blamed for not putting away the inceſtuous perſon; and if he that ſearcheth the hearts and trieth the reins was to examine his churches in the preſent day on this head, there is reaſon to fear he would have many charges againſt them for ſuffering thoſe who ought to be dealt with. If Proteſtants, who have a name for order and purity, were truly active and faithful, we ſhould not find erroneous, proud and looſe perſons walking about with their names in the churches es of Chriſt, as they do in ſome inſtances, to the grief and ſcandal of many. But, when a people profeſs a holy diſcipline in the houſe of God, and at the ſame time connive at ſin, are they not dead notwithſtanding they have a name that they live? And this was the caſe among the churches in Aſia at the time when theſe epiſtles were wrote, and it will ever be thus in proportion to our decay from the life and power of godlineſs.

And further; this may be the caſe in reference to the affection which is required in the communion of ſaints. A people may have a name for love to each other, when at the ſame time, on due examination, but little may be found of that goodneſs, ſympathy and delight among them, which is the genuine fruit of true chriſtian charity. Love is the leading grace to the works of faith, a defect in which is manifeſt where contentions and diviſions abound, which is ſometimes the caſe; but where things are not come to this paſs, the members of a church may be far from continuing in that deſirable harmony and intimate affection which belong to their character: At a diſtance it may be thought that they are in a ſtate of cordial friendſhip and union of ſoul, when alas to them that are within, there appears an unhappy ſpirit among them, or at leaſt, that inſtead of cleaving together as choſen companions, and being kindly affectionate in their behaviour, they ſcarce know one another, and through an unnatural diſtance and ſhyneſs are incapable of that mutual aſſiſtance and comfort which becomes their profeſſion. This ſtrange conduct among chriſtians in fellowſhip, is ſometimes owing to a corruption from the ſimplicity of the goſpel, the doctrines and ordinances of which are adapted to unite the diſciples; but when errors take place, iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxeth cold. However, brotherly love is not always anſwerable to the fame of a chriſtian ſociety; and when this is the caſe, in proportion to her deficiency, ſhe is truly ſtiled dead under a name to live, to the grief of thoſe who ſeek her proſperity.

Once

ONCE more; ſhe may have a name to live and yet be dead in reſpect of her aſſemblies. Frequent and general aſſemblies are eſſential to the performance of the works which belong to a church, in a forſaking of which, their fall is inevitable. Now the gatherings of a ſociety may be defective, and far ſhort of what they ſeem to ſpectators, or are reported to be. It may be thought ſtrange, but experience hath ſhewn, that a church ſtate may decline, and in a manner dwindle to nothing, in the midſt of a popular audience. Many may attend the ordinary means of grace in a chriſtian community, the members of which are very remiſs in thoſe ſpecial meetings, on which depend that diſcipline, and works which are needful to her welfare and increaſe; and when this becomes habitual among a people who are of repute in the churches, they fall under the deſcription before us, are in very great danger, and do well to take warning.

THESE falſe appearance and threatning declenſion in any community no doubt ariſes from the bad diſpoſition and conduct of thoſe who compoſe it, for this lifeleſs ſtate is inconſiſtent with the order and zeal of her members, ſo that even ſuch who, by their future repentance may appear to be diſciples indeed, muſt at preſent be in a ſleepy and carnal frame, while there is reaſon to apprehend that ſome, and thoſe not a few, are meer formal profeſſors, of whom it may be truly ſaid that they are ſpiritually dead, notwithſtanding their name among the living in Jeruſalem. However the reputation of a church ſo different from her real condition

tion as at Sardis, may be owing to one or more of the following occaſions:

1. To the gradual manner in which ſhe declined from her original perfection and vigour. When a church is firſt gathered her members are for the moſt part lively and active, they are full of zeal and good works; hence they have a name among the brethren, and this their character may remain after they have left their firſt love, from whence they go off by ſlow degrees, even almoſt imperceptably, at leaſt to others. Or again,

2. It may ariſe from comparing their ſtate with that of another community ſtill more declined. By this falſe rule of compariſon both particular perſons and bodies of men, ſometimes flatter themſelves to their ruin; but it ſhould be conſidered that in ſome reſpect or degree we may be better than others, and at the ſame time be in a very bad ſtate, yea and even nigh to deſtruction; ſo dangerous is that deceitful line by which we are but too much inclined to meaſure ourſelves and others. And,

3. The character of a church, even after ſhe is greatly declined, may awhile be ſupported, at leaſt with ſome, by the favor and good converſation of a few belonging to her who yet maintain their integrity, for perſons at a diſtance judge of the whole by the part they are converſant with, which ſhews, by the way, how much the reputation of a community depends on the good behaviour of her members, and ſhould be one motive

tive to virtue in every one who ſtands in the ſacred relation. On the other hand, it is not impoſſible but that ſome may be deceived by the miſrepreſentation of vain-glorious perſons who are diſorderly themſelves, yet boaſt of the community to which they belong. Theſe are the ordinary occaſions or means by which the good name of a church for purity and zeal may in ſome degree prevail, although in reality ſhe is very much ſunk, and her things which remain are dying away; namely, the gradual manner of her declenſion; the ſtill more deplorable ſtate of ſome other communities, with whom ſhe is compared, the reputation ſhe receives by a few of her members whoſe walk is agreeable; and the like falſe idea may alſo be promoted by the deceitful talk of ſome men.

But from whatever quarter the deception may ariſe, in this ſad hypocritical ſtate, a church is in the utmoſt danger of being diſſolved, for in proportion to her deadneſs ſhe is barren; a principal means of fruitfulneſs is wanting. It is true, the uprightneſs and zeal of a church, or the vigor and ſpirituality of its members, are not the efficient cauſe of increaſe; it is alone by the power of God that ſinners are converted, planted and flouriſh in the houſe of the Lord, yet the promiſe of the Spirit is to be expected in the way of our duty, both in a ſocial and private capacity; and accordingly the Laodiceans are threatned with the loſs of the candleſtick, and even to be caſt out with abhorrence, if they did not repent of their lukewarmneſs. Beſides, it appears from example, that the livelineſs and

activity of ſaints in communion, is a means ſubſervient to the work of the Spirit among them, for many are indebted to the earneſt prayers, the godly diſcourſe, and to other inſtances of piety and zeal in the faithful, as a means of their converſion, which is often confeſſed in the church by them that are called. The order and ſtedfaſtneſs of a people likewiſe engage the godly to join them, but it cannot be expected, and it is rarely ſeen that ſuch unite or continue with a church in a like ſtate with that at Sardis; and indeed where diſorders and hypocriſies prevail the Spirit is grieved and departs, whoſe divine agency, as already obſerved, is needful to any degree of ſucceſs. In a word, the analogy between natural and ſpiritual things is obvious, and though I am far from apprehending that they are in all reſpects the ſame, yet that the Lord in his ordinary courſe, works with and by the graces of his people, and renders their faithfulneſs and zeal a means of converſion and a flouriſhing ſtate of his church, cannot be modeſtly denied, inſomuch that Abraham had as good reaſon to hope for a child by Sarah, when her body was dead in the courſe of nature, as the moſt able and active miniſter in the world has to expect an increaſe of ſpiritual ſeed, from a people ſunk into the formality and coldneſs deſcribed.

ANOTHER melancholy ſymptom of this ſad and ſhameful condition, is an unperſuadable obſtinate ſpirit. It is exceeding difficult to convince a people in theſe circumſtances of their danger, for the moſt part they are inſenſible and ſecure, yea, and often ſo conceited

ceited of themſelves, that, in a manner, it is vain to exhort them; a remonſtrance of their folly and preſumption they impute to an uncharitable jealouſy, and are diſpleaſed, or it may be treat their faithful monitor with contempt; they reply in ſuch language as this: The former times were not better than theſe, others are ſtill more deficient, and in ſhort we are as well as can be expected, and thus they excuſe themſelves from amendment till they become incapable of bearing reproof, but are immediately offended with every attempt to reclaim them; ſo that, like Iſrael in the days of Amos the prophet, being ſet on their own ways, they hate the man that rebuketh in the gate, and abhor him that ſpeaketh uprightly unto them.

And now, who that fears God will not deprecate being in any degree the occaſion or ſubject of this odious and threatning ſtate of religion? May it never be a general caſe in our land! But, have we no alarming ſymptoms which call for a ſpeedy reformation, leſt we fall in like manner? To awaken our indignation at every thing which tends to this ſhameful condition, remember, that though the Lord is mercifully pleaſed to call ſuch a people to repentance, their hypocriſies are hateful in his ſight. To reſt in a formal communion and be careleſs and unfruitful, is to affront our holy Redeemer, who is jealous of his honor. By allowed partiality and neglect in his houſe, a people deſpiſe his authority, abuſe his love, diſgrace his name, and in a word, as it were provoke him continually to his face; and who can ſtand before him when he is angry? If

he is offended that hath the ſeven ſpirits and the ſeven ſtars, in whoſe power is every gift and divine operation, on which the welfare and even the exiſtence of a church-ſtate depends, what leſs can be expected but diſſolution and ruin? Wo be to them whoſe ſinful conduct and long provocations, bring down his judgments; they muſt anſwer the conſequence; for when the kingdom of heaven is removed from a land, many temporal miſeries attend the unſpeakable loſs, of which there are awful inſtances; but we ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak of the puniſhment that awaits thoſe who ſin away the goſpel, and leave their poſterity in darkneſs, in the following lecture. I conclude the preſent with a prayer, in which the ſerious Reader will certainly join me:

'LORD, ſend down thy holy Spirit to purify and 'quicken our hearts, that thy love may conſtrain us 'to a becoming zeal for thy glory, and that as we 'have a name that we live, we may ſhew that we are 'alive indeed unto God, and abound in every good 'work, to the promoting thy viſible kingdom in the 'world!'

LECTURE

LECTURE XXII.

The diſciples at Sardis exhorted to repent; their works are impeached. How the Lord appears a judge of what a people perform in his name. The meaſures to be taken to reſtore a church when declined. Reaſons for attempting it, notwithſtanding her things may be dying away.

THE omniſcient and holy Redeemer, having warned his church of her hypocritical and dangerous ſtate, goes on to exhort and rebuke her, the particulars of which, with proper reflections, are now to be conſidered. This part of his meſſage is contained in the following words: "Be watchful, and ſtrengthen "the things which remain, and which are ready to "die; for I have not found thy works perfect before "God." We are told, Matt. xiii. 24. that "the "kingdom of heaven is like to a man that ſowed good "ſeed in his field, in which while men ſlept the enemy "ſowed his tares." Decays in a church originally ſpring from a defect in herſelf, and the adverſary gains his firſt advantage by the inattention of her members. If chriſtians were on their guard, ſatan could have no opportunity of introducing thoſe poiſonous errors, and formal profeſſors, which are the bane of religious ſociety. Thus it appears that theſe diſciples were very remiſs. Hence temptations prevailed, and they were

daily declining; they are therefore admoniſhed to return to their watch. The firſt ſtep towards a recovery is to renew that diſcipline which, in the ſad ſtate complained of, muſt have been greatly neglected; a watch is to be ſet over ourſelves, and againſt the enemy, that no further place may be given him, without which we cannot with reaſon expect to reform; and accordingly we ſee a guard is placed at the door of this church, and at the hearts of her members, by way of prevention, and, this done, all hands are required to repair the houſe of the Lord, in the following words: "Strengthen the "things which remain and are ready to die."

It has been thought by ſome, that the things referred to are the graces of the Spirit, from the exerciſe of which, no doubt, there muſt have been a general decay among theſe diſciples; nor could they hope to revive as a church unleſs they were reſtored to a more vigorous habit of faith and love in Chriſt Jeſus; but they are wrong who would inſinuate from hence that a principle of grace may become extinct, or ceaſe to exiſt in the heart of a regenerate man, for it is expreſly declared, that "whoſoever is born of God, his ſeed re-"maineth in him," 1 John iii. 9. And again, that the grace, or water of life, given by Chriſt to him that is called, "ſhall be in him a well of water, ſpringing up into "everlaſting life," John iv. 14. So that nothing can be more certain than the final perſeverance of the ſaints; and therefore, however the viſible intereſt of religion may be on the decline, and particular churches decay or diſſolve, yea, and a child of God be found dead in his frame, the man that hath root in himſelf ſhall endure

dure to the end; ſuppoſing therefore that the graces of the chriſtian are here intended, it cannot be juſtly inferred, becauſe he may in this imperfect ſtate ſeem to languiſh awhile, and partially fail in his fruits, that therefore he ſhall totally fall from grace, and periſh at laſt. All that can be fairly concluded is this, that the real ſaint is liable to decays, againſt which it becomes him to watch, or that, when he is fallen, means are to be uſed for his recovery, which are truths univerſally acknowledged.

THEY ſeem nearer the purpoſe who underſtand by theſe things backſliders among them, who, in appearance, were on the point of caſting off their faith. In this view it is a ſeaſonable exhortation to the church to admoniſh and reprove them, and, if poſſible, prevent their total apoſtacy and ruin. But I apprehend that the works of this people, on which the Lord hath an eye, and which he declares to be imperfect in the very next clauſe, are the things chiefly, if not ſolely intended. And the things or works, which belong to a goſpel church-ſtate, are recited, Acts ii. 42. namely, doctrine, fellowſhip, breaking of bread and prayers, which comprehend the whole of the faith, worſhip and diſcipline eſſential to chriſtian communion. Now it ſeems there remained ſome works among this backſliding people, they were not totally departed from the truths of the goſpel, nor had they entirely forſaken the aſſembling of themſelves for the worſhip of God, and the diſcipline of his houſe; their united prayers were not wholly ceaſed, neither were they utter ſtrangers to thoſe offi-

ces of kindneſs and love which are the genuine fruit of a cordial fellowſhip in the Spirit. Had there been nothing of this found among them, they had not exiſted as a church; but alas, they were ſlothful and partial, and ſcarce ſaved appearances; they were ſo backward and unſtable, that theſe things were hardly maintained; they were ſinking daily, and ſeem almoſt expiring and gone. Under this ſhameful and dangerous declenſion they are called upon to reſtore and confirm their feeble and dying ſtate, each one to return to his duty, and to exert himſelf in repairing thoſe decays that were found in the houſe of the Lord.

As one means of awakening theſe backſliders to repentance, the holy Redeemer makes the following report, which might juſtly alarm them, "I have not "found thy works perfect before God!" q. d. 'I 'that ſearch the heart and try the reins, have ex-'amined thy works, and reject them as unſound and 'imperfect in the preſence of God; they are ſuch as 'cannot be pleaſing to him, nor will he accept them.' Thus the ſervices of theſe degenerate people are as it were thrown back in their faces, or returned upon them as naught. But, can we look for perfection in the works of a community compoſed of imperfect and fallible men, which is the caſe with the pureſt ſociety upon earth? No church ever yet pretended to infallibility, except that apoſtate one, whoſe errors, ſuperſtition and idolatry, notoriouſly contradict her arrogant claim; what then is intended by a want of perfection? The native idea of the expreſſion here uſed, is fulneſs, and this

this complaint manifeſtly intends a criminal * defect, or that ſhe did not exert herſelf with the integrity and diligence required. We are told that at Corinth they came behind in no gift; but, alas, at Sardis they are charged with not coming up to their ability, which amounts to no leſs than a charge of hypocriſy itſelf, and anſwers to the character already given of this church. The works of a church are imperfect, when her members deal deceitfully one with another, and are each making idle, it may be falſe pretences for not ſupplying his part; ſo that her aſſemblies are ſmall, and her works, however comparatively tolerable, come ſhort of the power ſhe hath, and what is required at her hands. In a word, when a people can do more and better than they do, and are ſhort for want of exerting the gifts they have received, then their works are not perfect; they may ſeem ſo to men, and to the delinquents themſelves, who, like thoſe of Laodicea, ver. 17. may boaſt that they are rich and increaſed in goods, but to the Lord, whoſe eyes are as a flame of fire, their ſinful imperfection appears, and on which account they are highly diſpleaſing in his ſight, and though he is gracious and long-ſuffering, yet he is jealous of his honor, and will one day condemn thoſe who trifle

* In like manner the Iſraelites who periſhed in the wilderneſs, are charged with not having fully followed the Lord, as Caleb and Joſhua did. See Numb. xiv. 24. The word מלא there uſed ſignifies compleat, or rather filled as a ſhip under ſail carried ſtrongly with the winds, as if ſhe feared neither rocks nor ſands. Leigh's Crit. And much the ſame idea is fixed by the late excellent Mr. Hervey to πλουσιως on 2 Pet. i. 11. Th s ſlackneſs and deficiency through neglect is highly provoking to the Lord, as appears from the above awful inſtance of his diſpleaſure; an enſample to warn us againſt ſloth and unfaithfulneſs, in what concerns our holy profeſſion.

trifle with his name, and neglect the ſacred inſtitutions of his love. Thus, as in the hand-writing of Belſhazzar, TEKEL is inſcribed on this fallen church, ſhe "is weighed in the ballances, and found wanting," by the King of ſaints. This charge is the more affecting, as it is laid on her works without any exception — "I have not found thy works perfect before God." Awful ſentence indeed! and the rather as it is a ſentence confirmed by the infallible truth of him that pronounced it. Had this charge proceeded from the lips of a creature, it might have been falſe; but who will diſpute what Jeſus, the Amen and faithful witneſs, declares? Many are the falſe accuſations which are laid againſt the righteous, by the world and ſatan, from which they ſhall hereafter be cleared, but that people are certainly guilty who are charged by the Lord himſelf; their mouths will therefore be ſtopped, neither ſhall any plead for them, no, nor ſave them from his juſt indignation, for as this rebuke implies his abhorrence of their ſloth and hypocriſy, it likewiſe beſpeaks his coming upon them in judgment unleſs they repent, according to a ſubſequent threatning.

FROM this account it appears that the Lord is judge of thoſe works which are performed in a goſpel church-ſtate, and that when his people are ſenſible of threatning declenſions, they are required to exert themſelves in order to recover; and it may be uſeful to conſider in what points of light the Lord is a judge of his people, the meaſures to be taken to revive an intereſt that is dying, and the reaſons there are for attempting it.

AND

And firſt, the judgment of Chriſt in his church is manifeſt in reſpect of his omniſcience. He is a God of knowledge, by whom actions are weighed, 1 Sam. ii. 3. This was the reſort of Peter in a time of diſtreſs, "Lord, thou knoweſt all things," John xxi. 17. And in Heb. iv. 13. ſays the apoſtle, "All things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." An excoriated beaſt, ſlain of old for a ſacrifice, hung up and opened to view, or even the anatomized body, doth not lie ſo expoſed to the eye of the ſkilful beholder, as our works to the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. He diſcerns the thoughts and intents of the heart, and hath an exact and intuitive knowledge of their number, nature and ſprings of action in his people, ſo that nothing eſcapes him. Again,

This character our Lord ſuſtains in reſpect of his office. He is not only Judge as a divine perſon, but alſo as Mediator. It belongs to him as the great Shepherd of the ſheep to inſpect and judge his people; to this he is appointed by the Father, who hath committed all judgment to his Son; ſo that Chriſt is inveſted with this power in his paſtoral capacity, being ſeated on the throne in his church. Every community under a profeſſion of his name, and each particular member thereof is ſubject to his examination, and muſt ſtand before his judgment-ſeat. And further, the Redeemer is judge of his people in a practical ſenſe; i. e. he actually and conſtantly inſpects their work in the character of a judge. We cannot with decency ſuppoſe that the holy Jeſus doth not execute the commiſſion he hath received,

or

or exert this authority in the midſt of his churches; and the inſtance before us proves that he is active in judgment upon them, for when he ſaith, "I have not "found thy works perfect," he ſpeaks as one that had examined and proved them; ſo that his eyes are on his people, not only as their Saviour to preſerve them, but alſo as their judge to try them; he has a ballance or meaſure in his hand to weigh and adjuſt all they profeſs to do in his name, and thoſe which are not perfect or full according to their ability he will ſurely reject, and regard not the perſons of any. In theſe reſpects our Lord is judge of what is done in the character of a church; in reſpect of his eſſential omniſcience as a divine perſon, in reſpect of his office, and in reſpect of his certain actual inſpection into their ſpirit and conduct.' It is therefore of the utmoſt importance when things are dying away in any community, that they hearken to his voice and repent, as will hereafter more particularly be ſeen.

But, what are the meaſures to be taken in order to revive an intereſt that appears on the decline? Before we enter on particulars here it may be proper to note, that when things are come to this paſs, and a church is ſunk ſo low, through long and repeated backſlidings, as to be ready to diſſolve, her awakened members are prone to deſpond, and may be tempted, through guilt and unbelief, or from ſloth and ſelf-love, to leave her, which is mean and ungrateful; yet this has been the conduct of ſome, in regard of the community to which they belonged, when ſhe ſeemed to be going; as a ſhip in diſtreſs is left by her company, who apprehend

hend ſhe will ſink or be otherwiſe loſt, ſo hath a church in danger been forſaken by her members, till broken to pieces and ruined; they could not endure the pains and ſelf-denial which peradventure might have ſaved her, but this is unbecoming a diſciple of Jeſus, and againſt his direction before us. It muſt therefore be highly diſpleaſing to him, when any thus evade their endeavour to preſerve and revive his declining cauſe; therefore let thoſe who would have boldneſs at his coming ſee to it, that nothing is wanting on their part to reſtore the ſinking intereſt of religion in their hands, and the meaſures to be taken in order to effect it are as follows:

1. A STRICT and impartial enquiry into the ſtate of the community, and the condition of its ſeveral members. In exhorting the diſciples at Sardis, to ſtrengthen the things which were ready to die, there ſeems an alluſion to a natural body, which having long languiſhed under a threatning diſtemper, is, in all appearance, nigh unto death: And every one knows, that when a phyſician is called in this dangerous caſe, he firſt examines into the nature of the diſeaſe, the parts affected, the time, occaſion, and progreſs which the diſorder hath made, with every other circumſtance relating to the patient's complaint: In like manner, when a people find themſelves on the decline, in order to their recovery, they muſt diſcern what errors and ill habits prevail, and conſider who are defective, and in what degree, under what temptation, and in a word, how far the corporation is degenerated from its natural and primitive ſtate. Without a juſt idea of her real condition, in

theſe

theſe particulars, the means of reſtoration cannot be applied; and things will grow worſe, till a diſſolution enſues, if not timely prevented. To this method we are directed in the following words: "Remember "therefore how thou haſt received and heard, and re- "pent." Of which in its place; for the preſent it may ſuffice, that in general this certainly implies a reflection on her fallen ſtate, that ſhe might be ſenſible of her declenſions, and even know the worſt of her caſe. This enquiry among a people ſufficiently awakened, who are in the way of recovery, will be perſonal, each affected will examine his own ſpirit and conduct, and ſay, "What have I done?" Jer. viii. 6. And the ſame will be carried on in public, by the inſpection of the paſtor and other officers, and likewiſe by the church herſelf, who, as a body corporate, will, in her diſcipline aſſemblies, be looking diligently, that by her ſeaſonable admonition, and even cenſure, if needful, ſhe may prevent a further ſpread of diſorders, and at length be perfectly reſtored. Again,

2. ANOTHER means required, is united and earneſt prayer to the Lord to heal our backſlidings. We have deſtroyed ourſelves, but our help is in him. The character Jeſus aſſumes, when ſpeaking to this people, implicitly directs them to himſelf, as poſſeſt of all thoſe gifts, and that grace which are needful to a flouriſhing ſtate. When the Lord is as the dew on Iſrael, then ſhe will revive as the corn; but for this he will be ſought unto, without which his bleſſing cannot be expected. Beſides the fervent prayers of the faithful, are

in

in themſelves a means of reſtoration: in prayer the graces of the Spirit are exerciſed and ſtrengthened. Prayer in the Spirit is of an edifying nature; by this the heart is humbled, melted, purified and refreſhed: Hence, Jude ver. 20. the brethren are directed, in a time of falling away, to "build up one another on their "moſt holy faith, praying in the holy Ghoſt." The declining ſtate of a church, appears in nothing more than in a neglect of her prayers: in proportion to this the love of God moſt ſurely decays, inſomuch that there is little or no hopes of recovery: When a people are not to be induced to wreſtle at the throne of grace, they muſt grow more and more formal and lifeleſs, and be in the utmoſt danger of ruin.

3. WHEN the things of a community are thus reduced, they are not likely to revive, unleſs there is a mutual activity and diligence in her members, in their ſeveral ſtations; every man to his poſt, and all hands employed in the work. As the recovery of the natural body from a threatning diſorder depends much on a due circulation, and each member performing its function, ſo is Chriſt. It is not ſufficient to behold our declenſions, or to bewail them, either to the Lord or to one another: Like Iſrael of old, 1 Chron. xxii. 16. we muſt ariſe and be doing, in hopes that the Lord will be with us. "Why ſtand ye cry-"ing? ſaith the Lord to Moſes, ſpeak to the children "of Iſrael that they go forward." In a word, inſpection and prayer are vain without a reſolution in the ſtrength of the Lord to hold faſt and repent. If prayer-meetings are ever ſo frequent or full, they will come

ſhort

ſhort of a remedy, unleſs individuals fill up their places; for the works of that church can never be perfect, whoſe members fail of their duty: To complain of defects without endeavouring to ſupply them, is highly abſurd, a conduct which tends ſtill more to weaken the cauſe. Now if any man would know his particular duty, under declenſions in the ſociety to which he belongs, his conſcience will tell him; and the ſcripture is ſo plain, with reſpect to that nobleſt of ſocieties, a church, that no one can plead ignorance. He that will not attend her aſſemblies, and exert his ability in the ſtation he holds, turns away his ear from the voice of Chriſt, and will not regard the welfare of Zion.

One motive in them who love God and his people, for exerting themſelves in reſtoring the affairs of a church when gone to decay, is her imminent danger. Hence the Lord notes to this people, that the things which remained were "ready to die;" q. d. conſider how near you are to a total loſs of thoſe things which belong to your ſtate; if they ſhould entirely ceaſe you are utterly ruined. Now the more threatning the caſe of a diſordered conſtitution, the greater the concern of him who deſires to preſerve it, and his diligence after its recovery will be in proportion: In like manner when things are ready to expire in a chriſtian community, an argument is drawn by her prudent and affectionate members, from the danger apprehended, for being ſpeedy and active to revive her. Again,

A prospect of her recovery is another inducement. This alſo is ſuggeſted in the warning before us. A command

command from God to repent and return to duty, implies a promiſe of remiſſion and ſucceſs to them that obey. This call on the church at Sardis was a kind intimation that ſhe might be recovered, and a ſeaſonable encouragement to ariſe for her help, and eſpecially as the Lord revealed himſelf to her under characters expreſſive of his power and grace. This was a token for good, and an argument with every wiſe and conſiderate perſon to do what in him lay to reſtore her, it appearing that however dangerous her caſe, it was not yet deſperate; yea, there was the higheſt reaſon to conclude that his labour ſhould not be in vain, ſince he that called him to this ſervice is able to render it effectual. While there is life, we ſay, there is hope. The animal frame may be in a languiſhing ſtate; through a prevailing diſeaſe, or a complication of diſorders, it may be brought very low, ſcarce any pulſe to be diſcerned, yea, and the vital principle ſo retire as to be out of the view even of a ſkilful phyſician, and at the ſame time it may exiſt, and recover its viſible force, ſo that it is not always eaſy to determine whether or not it is actually dead; but this we know, that as long as any ſenſible warmth and motion remains, there is hope that in the uſe of means the ſpirit may revive, and a vigorous circulation return, whereby the body ſhall again be ſtrengthened for the actions of life. In like manner the ſymptoms of ſpiritual life and the love of God, in which true religion ſubſtantially conſiſts, may, through a prevailing carnality and corruption, be reduced very low, and ſcarcely perceived in a chriſtian community, of whoſe recovery we are not to deſpair; there may yet be life in her; many of her

members, who ſeem formal and dead, may be concealed in darkneſs, diſcouraged and fearful under various temptations, who on due application may be animated and ſhew themſelves alive; their graces may yet be drawn forth into exerciſe, by whoſe activity and diligence the church will be reſtored and flouriſh again. Thus, though things are apparently dying, they may ſtill revive; and there is always ground to hope that a people however declined, being ſenſible of their condition, on returning to their Lord and their duty, ſhall not be diſſolved or deſtroyed; and is not this an argument for ſeeking to revive her again, even in the moſt dangerous circumſtances?

And further; the excellency and uſe of a chriſtian church-ſtate, is another ſtrong motive to an endeavour after its preſervation and welfare. We are fallen in a time when the yoke of Chriſt ſeems rather grievous to ſome, whoſe pretence of knowledge runs high, and have reaſon to lament that the communion of ſaints ſuits not the popular taſte of the day; yea, ſome even preſume to plead a liberty from it, and, as it were, glory in their neglect of goſpel-appointments, as if it was the privilege of a chriſtian to live free from the orders of his Lord, or becoming his character to deſpiſe them; but that notion of chriſtianity, which includes not a perſonal ſubjection to the ordinances of the Redeemer, is prepoſterous and vain, and a more threatning ſymptom cannot appear among nominal chriſtians, than a prevailing omiſſion of that divine fellowſhip in which the called bind themſelves to walk together in the Lord. If this becomes general in a nation, where the

the goſpel is preached, the kingdom of God will ſoon be removed, and along with it departs liberty, civil and religious, in conſequence of which a country is debaſed and enſlaved; witneſs all Aſia, and other parts of the earth, formerly the ſeat of flouriſhing churches, like the city of Sardis, once famous, while the golden candleſtick adorned her, but, as already obſerved, ſhe now appears a poor contemptible village. So then goſpel-churches are the glory of a land, with which ſtand connected all that is dear, and this will be an argument with every ſenſible perſon to exert himſelf in reſtoring the church to which he belongs, when her things are declining. Indeed the continuance of the goſpel doth not depend on any particular congregation, yet every ſociety of believers, in which the doctrine, diſcipline and worſhip of Chriſt is maintained, is a part of his viſible intereſt in a nation; it muſt therefore be a grief to thoſe who lay to heart the glory of God, and the good of mankind, when they behold ſuch a ſociety in danger of diſſolving.

THE importance of maintaining a goſpel-church will alſo appear, when we conſider the promiſe ſhe hath of the Redeemer's preſence and bleſſing, which is a further motive to preſerve it: By a diſſolution of an orderly ſociety of believers, who are entitled to this gracious aſſurance, we are deprived of one precious means of communion with God, the manifeſtative glory of Chriſt, the converſion of ſinners, and the comfort of them that believe; who then that hath any regard for the honor of Jeſus, or the welfare of ſouls, can fail of

being excited, on reflection, to uſe his utmoſt endeavour to prevent it?

Besides, it will be an argument with the awakened backſlider to a ſpeedy and vigorous attempt for reſtoring a church that is near a diſſolution, if he himſelf hath contributed to her threatning declenſions. Things never come to this paſs in a community without the defect and folly, at leaſt of many individuals; it is probable that few, if any, are entirely free from being in ſome meaſure the occaſion of this deplorable ſtate; however in proportion to a ſenſe of the injury done a ſociety by a man's own conduct, muſt his readineſs be to repair it. If we behold a natural body languiſhing under pain and ſickneſs, and in danger, will not humanity itſelf demand our immediate aſſiſtance, if poſſible, to revive it? But if, as may be the caſe, we are conſcious that our own neglect, or abuſe of this body, has been the ſhameful cauſe of its periſhing condition, are we not ſtill more obliged to lay out ourſelves with a view to its recovery? The application is eaſy. Every ingenuous perſon will be careful about reſtoring an intereſt, the declenſion of which is in ſome degree owing to himſelf. And if they who ſeem little concerned at the dying ſtate of a community to which they belong, and who are practically ſaying, Let the cauſe ſink, were duly ſenſible of their own conduct, they would ſee it highly incumbent on themſelves, more than on others, to ariſe for its help. Add to theſe, the reward which is inſured to thoſe who ſeek the honor of God, which is another juſt motive for reſtoring the beauty of his houſe.

houſe. This is expreſſed in a following clauſe: "He "that overcometh, the ſame ſhall be clothed in white "raiment;" of which in its place. It requires ſelf-denial and courage to ſtand up for the purity and order of the goſpel when it is generally neglected or deſpiſed. A man muſt exert his ability, and it may be endure the reſentment and ſcorn of thoſe who, wedded to their luſts, will oppoſe a reformation; and if he has heretofore, in any degree, complied with the evil of the time, or been off from his watch, which, as hinted, is probable, it will be ſtill more difficult for him; he muſt firſt cleanſe himſelf, and forſake every ſinful indulgence that hath turned him aſide, and may expect many reflections to diſhearten him from uniting in the work, but the man need not fear whoſe repentance is evinced by a return to his duty; he ſhall not only be forgiven, but likewiſe ſhare in the recompence promiſed; for no man's labour ſhall be vain in the Lord.

It appears then that the chriſtian ought not to forſake his ſtation in the church, when things are declined and ſeem ready to vaniſh away; no, by no means. The members of a community in decay have reaſon to mourn, and it may be, to be covered with ſhame for their own backſlidings, but can have none to deſpair; however threatning the danger, if they awake and repent, and diligently follow the things they have neglected, there is ſtill a proſpect of recovery, which, with the excellency of this goſpel-conſtitution, and eſpecially when the ſubject is conſcious of being acceſſary to the declenſions lamented, and the certain future reward of

the righteous, are cogent arguments for an attempt to reſtore a church-ſtate, even under the loweſt circumſtances that can be ſuppoſed. And, can the love of God dwell in that man, who is not to be engaged by either or all of theſe motives, unto a zeal for the welfare of Zion?

WHILE we mourn the dying intereſt of Jeſus among us, may we not juſtly admire his love and patience, thus to warn his backſliding people, and graciouſly meet them with a promiſe on repentance. But, Reader, forget not that religion is a perſonal thing, and allow me to ſay, that in whatever ſtate the particular community may be with whom thou art connected, as an hearer or member, thou thyſelf may be in a ſimilar condition with that of this church; in thy own religious experience and practice the things which remain may be on the decline, and almoſt expired. Permit me, with freedom, to aſk thee, How ſtands it with the frame of thy ſoul? It may be thy caſe. In time paſt ſin pierced thy heart, and thou waſt then anxious for repentance and pardon; thy breathing was earneſt after an intereſt in Chriſt, and the inheritance of them who are ſanctified by faith, in order to communion with the Lord and his people, but now, alas, theſe convictions are worn off, and, through the cares of the world and the pleaſures of life, thy former deſires are abated or gone, thou art ready to quit all concern about the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs, and to lay aſide the thoughts of living to the Saviour, under a profeſſion of his name. Doth conſcience tell thee that thou art

art in this manner gone backward, and that thine heart is almoſt a ſtranger to this holy concern and affection? Great is thy deluſion and danger! I beſeech thee to hear what Jeſus ſaith by his Spirit to this fallen church, "ſtrengthen the things which remain." It is of the utmoſt importance, therefore repent indue ſeaſon, for if thou art not conformed to this exhortation, behold, he cometh to judgment, when thou and thy religion, ſuch as it is, will periſh together.

But again, my dear Friend, how is thy private devotion maintained? Enter into thy cloſet, true religion firſt appears there, and there a decay from its power is firſt to be diſcerned. Once every opportunity of retirement was embraced, to pour out thy ſoul unto God, to contemplate his law, and for ſelf-examination; then it was thy cuſtom to come forth from thy chamber into the family, thy children and ſervants were aſſembled for prayer, reading, and other exerciſes of a ſpiritual nature. Thus ſome begin, and it may be go on for awhile, till worldly buſineſs and carnal company interfere; alas, they cannot withſtand the temptation, their goodneſs is as the morning-cloud, and as the early dew it paſſeth away. And are any like ſymptoms on thee, chriſtian Reader? are theſe things omitted, or are they attended in an uncertain, cold and indifferent manner, inſomuch that there is danger of their being utterly forſaken? O be wiſe, and conſider, ariſe from the dead, flee from thoſe luſts that have enticed thee,

and return immediately unto him from whom thou haſt fooliſhly departed.

FINALLY, Is there a ſenſible and viſible alteration for the worſe in thy public or ſocial religion? Formerly thy feet were prepared for the temple, and hearing the word of the Lord was delightful, it was a pleaſure to ſit at his table, and his ordinances were highly eſteemed, inſomuch that the return of his ſabbaths was the joy of thy ſoul: But haſt thou loſt thy relish for theſe ſacred and precious enjoyments? are they become wearineſs to thee? and doſt thou excuſe thyſelf on every occaſion, and of choice abſent from the ſanctuary, or make light of thy deficiency in the relative duties of communion? It is indeed a ſad caſe to become thus unfruitful, and for the leavs of thy profeſſion to fade and fall off in this manner. Thus hypocrites often ſlide away and turn apoſtates to their ruin. Far be it the Reader ſhould have in the end his portion with unbelievers! but I would hope better things, even things that accompany ſalvation. And haſt thou eſcaped or overcome the temptations by which many are caſt down and deſtroyed, and in a flouriſhing ſtate, in theſe points of religion; thou art highly favoured of heaven? Adore the grace by which thou haſt ſtood, be ſtill on thy guard, and whoever draws back, cleave thou with purpoſe of heart unto the Lord. In one word, may all who call upon the name of the Lord hearken unto the words of Peter, in the cloſe of his ſecond epiſtle, and with which I conclude this lecture. "Ye therefore, beloved, ſeeing ye know theſe things

"before,

" before, beware, leſt ye alſo, being led away with the
" error of the wicked, fall from your own ſtedfaſtneſs;
" but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our
" Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt: To him be glory,
" both now and forever. Amen."

LECTURE XXIII.

A repetition of the Redeemer's call to repentance, with particular directions; and a threatning in caſe of diſobedience.

OUR Lord having called upon the church at Sardis, to reſtore the things that were dying away, graciouſly directs her how to proceed, but at the ſame time threatens her if ſhe did not repent: " Remember therefore how thou haſt received and heard,
" and hold faſt and repent. If therefore thou ſhalt
" not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou
" ſhalt not know in what hour I will come upon thee."
An awakening meſſage, by which they who are on the decline in their religious character are inſtructed and warned, and which may be applied to chriſtians in every age, in a private or ſocial capacity.

THE principal thing to be conſidered is that which ſtands firſt, an exhortation to look back and review paſt experience and conduct from the beginning: " Remember there-
" fore how thou haſt received and heard." Hearing is the means

means of the obedience of faith; and this degenerate people are directed to reflect on the manner in which they embraced the truth, or the ſpirit and behaviour which prevailed among them at the beginning. It is a call on the church, or on her members in particular. In reſpect of ſociety, it refers to their original ſimplicity and zeal in the faith and order of Chriſt, from whence ſhe was fallen: "Remember how thou haſt received and "heard;" call to mind the manner of entrance the goſpel had when firſt preached among you, with what readineſs and joy ye received it, on what foundation the church-ſtate was raiſed, how watchful, diligent, and lively her members, and compare it with her preſent ſecure and lukewarm condition.

Some apply this to the preſent ſtate of the Proteſtant churches, who are in general but too much gone off from that purity in doctrine, worſhip and diſcipline, for which they were famous, when they firſt renounced the errors of Rome, as obſerved in a preceeding lecture, and particularly in reſpect of the grand and capital article of juſtification by grace, in oppoſition to the merit of works. It cannot modeſtly be denied, but that the religious ſentiments and practice, which now prevail in Geneva, Holland, and other foreign Proteſtant ſtates, differ wide from thoſe that were avowed on the reformation: And, O that our native country could be excepted! But, alas, the pulpit, the preſs, and the popular taſte, unite in declaring our ſhameful departure. This alſo appears when we compare the tenets which are in a manner univerſally ſpread, with the inſtruments of original union and articles of faith, which, notwithſtanding

ing the contempt caſt upon the truths contained in them, are ſtill extent by public authority, together with the writings of the firſt reformers in every place; all which loudly teſtify againſt us!

But, paſſing this, the people at Sardis were greatly corrupted, inſomuch that few had eſcaped the general pollution; ſo ſad was their departure from the ſimplicity and holineſs which originally adorned the church in that place, the remains of which glory was fading away. In theſe diſgraceful circumſtances ſhe is bid to *remember*. In a diſordered ſtate of body, no faculty is ſooner impaired then the memory; and a chriſtian ſociety, when ſunk and depraved, are forgetful of their former zeal and good works; a ſerious reflection on which might bring them to repentance. The preciſe date of the epiſtle is uncertain, but doubtleſs this church, with others in Aſia, had ſubſiſted a conſiderable time; ſo great a declenſion could hardly obtain in a few years only, yet ſome aged perſons, as the evangeliſt himſelf, might remember her gathering, and witneſs the melancholy difference.

Under theſe decays the ſame reflection becomes individuals; every perſon ſhould examine himſelf, and enquire, how did I come under a profeſſed ſubjection to the goſpel? Was it from a deep conviction of my miſerable ſtate as a ſinner, and a perſuaſion of the authority and grace of Jeſus, as the only and all-ſufficient Saviour, that I truſted in him, and ſurrendered myſelf to his will? O my ſoul, now ſo unſavuory and careleſs, call to mind the love of thine eſpouſals, and the kindneſs of thy youth!

youth! How didſt thou receive Chriſt Jeſus the Lord, and hear the tidings of his mercy! how precious then was the word of his grace! with what ſweetneſs and power did it come to thy heart! O the readineſs and joy with which thou laid hold on the hope ſet before thee! thou waſt then impatient for ſeaſons of communion with the Lord and his people; but now, alas, how indifferent towards them, the new moons and ſabbaths are almoſt a wearineſs to thee; conſider how thou art fallen; the danger thou art in, and how provoking thy conduct, and repent! When a backſliding chriſtian is enabled thus to reflect on his firſt ſetting out in religion, there is hope of his recovery, and that he will be ſtedfaſt in every branch of his holy profeſſion, which is the next thing required. "And hold "faſt," i. e. keep diligently * the precious doctrines and ordinances thou haſt received, with a watchful eye, that they be not loſt or taken away, which agrees with the following ſentence, and implies the danger they were in through the ſubtlety of ſatan, to whom they had already given place, and likewiſe that it required their utmoſt ſolicitude and ſtrength to preſerve them. It is added, "and repent," i. e. be wiſe and turn from your evil, as perſons convinced of their folly, return unto me. The word ſignifies afterwit, and alludes to the madneſs of thoſe who depart from the Lord. Thus the prodigal, who is an emblem of a penitent ſinner or backſlider, is ſaid to come to himſelf. When men wander from God and the order of the goſpel, it may truly be ſaid that a deceived heart hath turned them aſide, they are as it were infatuated through

* Τήρει.

through the deceitfulneſs of ſin; and when ſuch are reſtored to their ſpiritual ſenſes, they will be covered with ſhame, and thankful for the grace that has prevented their ruin, and their change will be attended with future diligence in every duty.

As a further means of awakening this church, ſhe is threatned in caſe of diſobedience: "If therefore thou "ſhalt not watch;" if, after all my patience and warning, thou continueſt ſupine and careleſs, and will not awake and be on thy guard, "I will come upon "thee as a thief. Many are the chaſtnings in ſtore for a looſe and hypocritical generation of profeſſors; ſometimes they are hewed by the prophets of the Lord, and ſlain by the words of his mouth, Hoſ. vi. 5. He animates his ſervants to cry aloud and ſpare not, but ſhew them their tranſgreſſions and ſins, who are ſure to meet with their reſentment, unleſs they are reclaimed. At other times the hand of his providence is againſt them, and they are diminiſhed by ſickneſs and death, as at Corinth. Again, he hides his face that they cannot behold him, or it may be his Spirit is with-held, and the dew is not on their fleece; they are barren and comfortleſs, their breaſts are dry, and a miſcarrying womb is their portion, Hoſ. ix. 14. Or, once more, when joined to their idols, as Ephraim, he lets them alone. Theſe are tokens of his diſpleaſure, which a ſenſible people will deprecate: But the threatning before us is ſtill more alarming, it is not to correct but to deſtroy; a threatning of vengeance, the terror of which will appear, if we conſider,

1. THAT

1. THAT the Lord himſelf was to come upon them. If an angel, or even but a man had been commiſſioned from heaven to chaſtize them in anger, they might juſtly have trembled at the thought of his approach, but how fearful to fall into the hands of the living God, of Jeſus himſelf, whoſe power is infinite, and whoſe face, as an angry judge, neither earth nor heaven can endure! Every attribute aſcribed to the Redeemer in that grand and awful deſcription, chap. i. and elſe where, is properly applied to this threatning, "I will come upon "thee:" I, whoſe eyes are as a flame of fire, who ſearcheth the heart and the reins; I, whoſe feet are as fine braſs, as if they burned in a furnace, to tread down mine enemies and trample them in my fury; I, whoſe voice is as the ſound of many waters, as the roaring of the ſea; I that have the ſeven ſtars in my right hand, and out of whoſe mouth goeth a ſharp two-edged ſword; I, whoſe countenance is as the ſun ſhining in his ſtrength, before whom no fleſh can ſtand; in a word, I, that have the keys of death and hell, and kill and make alive at my pleaſure; I, even "I will come upon thee." Awful expectation! Who among the guilty is prepared to meet this offended God in his anger! But,

2. THE compariſon uſed by our Lord to illuſtrate his coming, is another conſiderable aggravation, "as "a thief." This denotes the manner and the end of his viſitation. 1. It implies that he would come on a ſudden; which indeed is contained in the phraſe itſelf, *come on*, 1 Sam. ii. 34. but the idea is ſtill more enlivened by the

the compariſon, the thief cometh unawares. Hence ſaith our Lord, Matt. xxiv. 43. "If the good man of "the houſe had known in what watch the thief would "come, &c." And that this is principally intended, appears from the following ſentence, "Thou ſhalt not "know in what hour I will come upon thee." In this manner the world of old was deſtroyed, and thus it will be in all divine judgment, "the day of the Lord "ſo cometh as a thief in the night," 1 Theſſ. v. 2. and particularly in removing the candleſtick out of his place, for the ſins of a backſliding people: "Behold I "come as a thief. Bleſſed is he that watcheth and "keepeth his garments," Rev. xvi. 15. which agrees with the condition in the text, already conſidered. Beſides this, 2. it alſo intimates the end of his coming, which is to deprive * and ruin the impenitent: "The "thief cometh not, but for to ſteal, and to kill, and "to deſtroy," John x. 10. Thus the wrath of the Lamb comes on wilful and ſtubborn tranſgreſſors, but with this difference, that, whereas the conduct of the thief is unjuſt and ſinful, the judgments of the Lord are righteous. And,

3. THIS threatning is the more dreadful, as it leaves no hope of further warning or patience: It is the laſt meſſage, in contempt of which they are doomed to immediate

* Chriſt cannot be ſaid to come as a thief in an evil ſenſe, morally ſpeaking; his eſſential goodneſs and righteouſneſs forbid our entertaining ſo baſe or unworthy idea of his coming, as that it is with any unjuſt or cruel deſign, but certainly the end of his judgment is the deſtruction of unbelievers and hypocrites, and the compariſon is only in reſpect of ſuch; "for ye, brethren, are not in darkneſs, that that day ſhould overtake you "as a thief," 1 Theſſ. v. 4.

immediate deſtruction; nothing can be more abſolute than the terms of this awful declaration, "If "therefore thou ſhalt not watch, I will come upon "thee." Wo be to them who are at eaſe in Zion; they are threatned with ſudden deſtruction from the Lord, who will himſelf come upon them, except they repent.

SEE then, O chriſtian, the diſpleaſure of thy Redeemer with thoſe who are unfaithful and fruitleſs under a profeſſion of his name; he is a holy and jealous God, and cannot endure a lukewarm and deceitful conduct in them that approach him. He hath compaſſion on the frames of his ſaints, yea, and when they ſin through infirmity, he is their advocate with the Father, as it were, to cover their involuntary failings, and to plead againſt every accuſation of the adverſary; but when a people, having the form of godlineſs, become habitually negligent and partial, it is an affront to all his perfections; ſuch perſons provoke him to his face, and if after due warning, they preſume in this manner to deſpiſe him, his anger will ſmoke againſt them, and utterly conſume them!

BEWARE then of ſettling on the lees, and reſting in a name for religion; thou art under a profeſſion and waſt formerly active and fruitful, but art thou now become lifeleſs and formal? Remember the zeal and good works of this fallen church in her primitive ſtate was no excuſe for her preſent defection and ſloth, ſhe is threatned with the vengeance of heaven notwithſtanding her former goodneſs, and the fame ſhe now had for being

being alive, theſe things availed not with the Lord in whoſe ſight ſhe was falſe, and came ſhort of her character; therefore be not ſecure in the opinion of men, God is not mocked; and when he comes on impenitent tranſgreſſors, the works they have forſaken will witneſs againſt them, rather than juſtify their preſent hypocriſy and negligence, or hide them from his wrath; therefore, boaſt not thyſelf, thou backſliding profeſſor, in what thou haſt been, or in what others now take thee to be; ariſe from the dead, and repent, ſo ſhalt thou be approved of thy judge, and his anger ſhall not fall upon thee.

How deplorable the condition of thoſe who are overtaken by an injured and offended Saviour! The ſuggeſtion is ſtrong with reſpect to this church, that if Chriſt came upon her, as he threatned, ſhe would be miſerably deſtroyed: "I will come on you;" q. d. and what will you do? whither can you flee? Haſt thou an arm like God? or canſt thou thunder with a voice like him? if I am againſt thee, who can be for thee, or ſave thee? This is the language of the threatning before us; it is the word of a King, and it comes with power, for he is able to deſtroy all thoſe who hate him. If ſatan or the world come on a church, or the chriſtian is attacked from any other quarter, the temporary ſuffering and loſs may be great, yet a deliverer is at hand, but when the omnipotent Jeſus himſelf overtakes the ſinner in judgment, there is no eſcape or remedy, deſtruction will enſue; he is terrible in righteouſneſs, when he comes to take vengeance on the workers of iniquity, and more eſpecially on hypocrites in Zion.

Hear what he ſays when he uttered his voice and roared out of Zion: "I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and "as a young lion to the houſe of Judah: I, even I will "tear, and go away; I will take away and none ſhall "reſcue him," Hoſea v. 14. He is ſtill the ſame Lord, who will judge his people, and this will be the miſerarable end of all who deſpiſe him.

NEVERTHELESS, the patience and grace of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt are diſplayed, and demand our attention; he is ſlow to anger, and warns the generation that provoke him to jealouſy before he comes on them to their ruin. Thus he waited long in the days of Noe before the flood came upon them, and forty years was he tempted by them who fell through unbelief in the wilderneſs; alſo the like ſpace was granted to Jeruſalem after the time of our Saviour, and ſince the ſpread of his kingdom in the world. No nation or people was ever deprived of a goſpel church-ſtate till after many warnings and great provocations. The language of Chriſt in his word and providence, with reſpect to a fallen people, is like that by the prophet to Ephraim, "How ſhall I give thee up?" as if his heart turned within him; his repeated exhortations and much long-ſuffering ſhews that he delights not in the deſtruction of a people, or in removing the candleſtick out of his place; they ſpeak againſt the diſſolution of churches, and call loud on delinquents to repent and be ſaved.

IT appears then, that nothing but a perverſe and impenitent ſpirit will bring down the wrath of God on a people; however long a church may have been on the decay

decay or low ſhe is ſunk, though ſhe hath years been declining, and her works are very imperfect, inſomuch that, as at Sardis, her things which remain are ready to die, yet, if it at length, by any means, her members are awakened, and return to the Lord, he will have mercy upon them; and the like may be obſerved in regard of any one perſon who is under declenſion; a penitent backſlider is not caſt into deſpair by the ſevereſt threatnings of Chriſt, whoſe love, grace and power are more than ſufficient to reſtore him, and who is ready to heal his backſlidings and accept the calves of his lips. This ſhould engage us when chaſtned for our ſinful departures, to excite one another in the language of Ephraim and Judah, Hoſ. vi. 1. "Come, let "us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he "will heal us; he hath ſmitten, and he will bind us "up." In this confidence every repenting ſinner, and backſliding people, may come to the Lord, and find reſt for their ſouls.

To conclude. Let this divine meſſage be improved by the faithful in a way of prevention. This fallen church is directed to remember how ſhe had received, and heard; a ſtep which was needful towards her recovery; and the ſame means will be of excellent uſe againſt every temptation to ſin, and of keeping up a lively ſenſe of religion in the ſoul. Chriſtian, let thy firſt ſetting-out in the ways of the Lord be ever before thee; daily recollect the grace and power exerted in thy converſion; remember Bethel, where thou anointed the pillar, and began thy vows unto thy God; when no eye ſaw thee, and thou gaveſt thyſelf unto the

Lord; alſo frequently conſider the manner and motives of thy public ſurrender; with what reverence, hope and joy, waſt thou baptized in the name of the Lord, came into his houſe, ſat down at his table, and numbered thyſelf with his ſaints. O the grateful ſenſe of his power and grace on theſe ſolemn occaſions! How did it melt thee, and cauſe thee to pour out thy ſoul in ſecret, with fervent ſupplications, and holy reſolutions to cleave to the Lord with purpoſe of heart! A frequent review of thy experience in theſe gracious ſeaſons hath a tendency to preſerve thee in an hour of temptation, and prevent thoſe backſlidings which in many have made work for bitter repentance; but if any man is already fallen into ſin, this recollection will revive the evidence of his calling, and promote his recovery, ſince this is the language of a covenant God to his people, who mourn their declenſions: "Turn, "O backſliding children, for I am married unto you." And again, "Return, thou backſliding Iſrael, ſaith the "Lord, and I will not cauſe mine anger to fall upon "you." Haſt thou been thus mercifully reſtored, my dear Friend? it will appear in thy holineſs and love; keep thyſelf unſpotted, and, notwithſtanding thine unworthineſs, thou ſhalt have honor with thy Redeemer at his appearance and kingdom.

LECTURE

LECTURE XXIV.

The faithful diſtinguiſhed in a time of general defection, with the promiſe of a glorious reward.

HITHERTO the epiſtle has bore a gloomy and threatning aſpect; but to the upright there ariſeth a light in darkneſs; an illuſtrious example of this now appears for the encouragement of thoſe who fear God in a degenerate age: "Thou haſt "a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled "their garments; and they ſhall walk with me in "white, for they are worthy," ver. 4. Amidſt the lukewarmneſs and hypocriſy which in a manner univerſally prevailed, here are preſented to our view, choſen and faithful perſons excepted from the general indictment, and owned of the Lord, with a promiſe. The names of God's people * are written in heaven, and ever before him. This, no doubt is true in the moſt literal ſenſe, for it cannot with reaſon be queſtioned but the omniſcient Jeſus, that great ſhepherd of the flock †, calleth his own ſheep by name; but, in the paſſage before us, names are evidently perſons, and the term thus applied conveys an idea of reputation and honor;

* Luke x. 20.

† John x. 3. Accordingly ſome perſons were propheſied of by name two or three hundred years before their birth, witneſs Joſiah and Cyrus. See 1 Kings xiii. 2. 2 Kings xxii. xxiii. and Iſa. xliv. 28.

for inſtance, Eccleſ. vii. 1. it is ſaid, "A name," i. e. a good name, "is better than precious ointment." And again, Job, chap. xxx. 8. ſpeaks of baſe men, i. e. literally, *men without name* *; not but the vileſt of men are ſometimes exalted; as in the days of Malachi, chap. iii. 15. the proud were called happy, and they who worked wickedneſs were ſet up; then the name of the righteous is rather a prey than a praiſe; but, however deſpiſed or traduced by men, they are a ſweet ſavour to God, and ſhall be honored by him: So then theſe names are no other than eminent and honorable perſons of real character, and not of report only, as with the church in general, but good men and true, in the ſight of him who trieth the reins, and accordingly are eſteemed and rewarded. This account contains a deſcription of the perſons commended, their recompence of reward, and the propriety or fitneſs of conferring this honor upon them. And they are deſcribed,

1. By the ſmallneſs of their number, *a few*. The flock of Chriſt is little compared with the world, "Many be called but few choſen:" But the compariſon here is with the members of this church, the generality of whom were ſadly declined, only here and there one, through grace, had maintained a good conſcience, whom the Lord diſtinguiſhes from the reſt. Numbers are no certain note of truth, and the ſmalleſt part of a divided ſociety may appear to be right; however, as we ſhall preſently ſee, the character of the faithful, when religion is on the decline, is in proportion to the number of thoſe who are defected.

2. Their

* בלי שם

2. THEIR purity is another part of the deſcription, "which have not defiled their garments." The alluſion is obvious. Garments are what men inveſt themſelves with, and in which they appear according to their rank and condition: Spiritually taken, they are the religious habit and courſe of nominal chriſtians, in the ſight of God, angels and men. Thus we read, Iſa. lxi. 10. of the "garments of ſalvation, and the robe "of righteouſneſs." Theſe, at leaſt the latter of theſe, is no other than the righteouſneſs of God, which is by the faith of Jeſus Chriſt, with which all true believers are clothed and adorned unto their compleat and everlaſting juſtification; but here it ſeems principally, if not ſolely intended, of the profeſſion and behaviour of thoſe honorable diſciples, and points to their order, the ſtedfaſtneſs of their faith, and their holy converſation: Thus holy Job declares, in vindication of his character, chap. xxix. 14. "I put on righteouſneſs "and it clothed me; my judgment was as a robe and "a diadem." In like manner theſe upright ſouls were not turned from the ſimplicity of the goſpel, nor tainted with the common pollutions, but held faſt, having nobly withſtood the prevailing corruptions, and kept themſelves clean, "hating even the garment ſpotted "with the fleſh," like the virgins mentioned, Rev. xiv. 4. who had "not defiled themſelves with women." Theſe, I ſay, as chaſte virgins eſpouſed to Chriſt, were free from the ſpots by which many had diſgraced themſelves and his name; not that we are to ſuppoſe they had no defects to lament, or were totally free from occaſional error: it is not ſaid that their garments were

not defiled, but that they had "not defiled their gar-"ments." Whether the Reader ſees a real difference between theſe forms of expreſſion or not, I preſume he will readily admit, that this account ſhews they had not wilfully corrupted themſelves, but preſerved their integrity, and bore a teſtimony, at leaſt in their practice, againſt the diſorder and licentiouſneſs which prevailed in the church, and had reduced her to ſo threatning a condition. Thus they were without guile before God, and free from the general charge. And,

3. THE integrity of theſe worthy perſons is further illuſtrated, by a glance on the exceeding degeneracy of the people with whom they ſtood connected, *even* in Sardis. The particle is juſtly ſupplied; it being wonderful indeed that any ſhould be clean in ſo degenerate a company, among whom the life and power of religion was in a manner extinct; yet this was the fact, notwithſtanding the community was declining apace, and even nigh to a diſſolution, through the depravity of her members, there was a number, though but few, who were enabled to retain a ſpirit and conduct becoming their holy profeſſion, with whom the Lord was well-pleaſed.

THIS report is made to the angel or miniſter of the church: "Thou haſt a few names, &c." I apprehend, not ſo much to inform him, for can it be ſuppoſed that theſe ſingular profeſſors were unknown to their paſtor? Not without highly impeaching his character. Formality and ſin in a people are a ſnare to their miniſter; and when errors and diſorders prevail, it requires peculiar

culiar fortitude and grace to withſtand the tide of corruption, ſo as not in any degree to connive at ſome evil, and deſerve reproof; but though I would not inſinuate that paſtors are never, or even ſeldom to blame, the contrary of which is notorious, nor would I cover or extenuate their faults, which are more heinous than the errors of perſons in a private capacity; yet, as formerly hinted, it doth not appear that the miniſter at Sardis is particularly charged; it ſeems therefore natural, in charity, to rank him among thoſe faithful ſervants of the Lord who are grieved to the heart to ſee things dying under their hands: In the like ſorrowful caſe we ſee ſome have been overwhelmed, they have dwelt on the declenſions and apoſtacies of the multitude, and overlooked the exceptions there are from the general decay, till they have almoſt deſpaired of a recovery: Thus Elias thought he was alone, and that true religion would expire with his life, when at the ſame time a very large number were reſerved from the idolatry of the times. And this notice from the Lord to his ſervant at Sardis ſeems to be to comfort him, and alſo to inſpire him with courage to attempt a reformation: Be that as it may, in this inſtance we ſee, and it may juſtly be admired, that the exalted Saviour, the great and chief Shepherd, graciouſly ſtoops from his throne, to give his under-keeper an account of the ſtate of his flock, before whom, as their judge, both he and his backſliding people were ſhortly to appear.

Now the recompence inſured theſe upright diſciples, is not any preſent or temporary reward, but an honor and happineſs far exceeding every thing to be enjoyed in

in this world, and is couched in the following terms, "They ſhall walk with me in white." Some reſpectable writers* have thought that this of walking with, or before God, is peculiar to a pleaſing adminiſtration of an office: Thus did Enoch as a prophet, and Noah as a preacher of righteouſneſs. And 1 Sam. ii. 30. the Lord ſaith unto Eli, "I ſaid indeed, that thy "houſe, and the houſe of thy father, ſhould walk be-"fore me for ever;" i. e. as appears from the context, in the office of a prieſt: But, with ſubmiſſion, the phraſe is extended to the behaviour or walk of the faithful in a private capacity. Abraham, though poſſeſſed of a promiſe that his ſeed ſhould be multiplied, ſeems not inveſted, properly ſpeaking, with an office when the Lord ſaid unto him, "Walk before me, and "be thou perfect," Gen. xvii. 1. However, it is certain that "to walk humbly with thy God," Mic. vi. 8. is not confined to perſons of a public character, but that it becomes every chriſtiain to "walk worthy of the "Lord unto all well-pleaſing," according to Col. i. 10. and other paſſages in the New-Teſtament, where the ſame idea is conveyed. In this ſenſe, they who defile not their garments, walk before God with an holy awe of his divine majeſty and preſence, and an hatred of ſin; and in keeping his commandments they are often indulged with that ſweet communion, and thoſe manifeſtations of his love, which greatly over-ballance every trial they meet with; but the reward here intended is manifeſtly future; and accordingly it is laid out in terms, frequently uſed by the Holy Ghoſt, to ſet forth the

* Aynſworth on Gen. v. 24. and vi. 9.

the bleſſedneſs of the righteous in the world to come, which it may be uſeful to conſider: And,

1. It is ſaid, "they ſhall *walk*." In natural walking the powers of the body are exerciſed, and the ſubject makes a delightful progreſſion to the end he is purſuing: it denotes life, ſtrength, freedom and joy, and moſt fitly repreſents their happineſs who are entered into life, free from weakneſs and ſin, and filled with joy in the preſence of God: This agrees with Iſa. xxxv. 10. The redeemed ſhall walk there. And again, chap. lvii. 2. it is ſaid of good men departed, that "they reſt in their beds, each one walk-"ing in his uprightneſs." And further it is affirmed, Rev. xxi. 24. that "the nations of them which "are ſaved ſhall walk in the light of the heavenly "city." Again,

2. To be *with God* or with Chriſt; i. e. in their immediate preſence, is another known deſcription of the ſaints in paradiſe. Thus in Phil. i. 23. Paul declares his deſire "to depart and to be with Chriſt." And our Saviour in John xvii. 24. prays to the Father, ſaying, "I will that thoſe whom thou haſt given me be "with me where I am;" namely, in heaven, "that they "may behold my glory." And,

3. This honor of the faithful is ſtill more ſtrongly expreſſed by their walking with Jeſus in *white*; this will occur in a ſubſequent lecture, but it is needful to touch

touch on it here. White is an emblem of purity and glory: Thus appeared the angel that rolled back the ſtone from the ſepulchre; we are told, that "his rai-"ment was white as ſnow." In like manner when our Lord was transfigured on the mount, his veſture was white as light, a brightneſs more reſplendent than the meridian ſun. It may allude to the garments of the prieſts, who were dreſſed in white linen, to ſignify their conſecration and acceptance with the Lord, who is holy, or rather to the white robes which conquerors anciently wore in their triumphal proceſſions; both ideas are ſuited to the character of the faithful "who overcome "through the blood of the Lamb, being made kings "and prieſts unto God, and his Father," Rev. i. 6. In a word, if it be enquired, when this will come to paſs? No doubt it will commence in a degree in the ſeparate ſtate of the righteous, but the reference is more directly to the ſecond appearance of Chriſt, even to that grand proceſſion of Jeſus in the day of his revelation from heaven, when he ſhall be glorified in his ſaints, and admired in all them that believe; or rather it terminates in the ultimate glory of the redeemed, which ſhall be everlaſting. Thus each member of the promiſſary ſentence correſponds with the language of ſcripture, when it points out the future glory of the ſaints, and together they yield a full and moſt lively deſcription of the reward which is laid up for thoſe who maintain their integrity, and hold out to the end.

It remains to conſider the propriety or fitneſs of conferring this honor on theſe holy men, and the reaſon aſſigned

aſſigned is no other than this, " for they are worthy." Now methinks the ſincere believer is ready to bluſh at this gracious expreſſion: Can worthineſs be juſtly aſcribed to a ſinful creature, redeemed by the blood of Jeſus? O my ſoul, what is thy faith, or what are thy works? Suppoſe thou haſt not defiled thy garments, is it more than became thee? Thou art then an unprofitable ſervant, and ſtill more indebted to the ſovereign mercy, and power of God, by whom thou haſt ſtood, and thy boaſting is for ever excluded. In this manner will the pureſt ſaint upon earth, on the apprehenſion of there being any glory attributed to him, however comparatively perfect his works, in point of integrity, check the firſt riſing thought of merit in himſelf, and with unfeigned humility and gratitude declare: " By the grace of God I am what I am." But the truth is, that no ſuch worthineſs is intended. The labourer, we ſay, is worthy of his hire; he hath earned his wages, and it is his juſt due; alſo the wicked righteouſly ſuffer the vengeance of the Almighty, they ſtrictly and properly deſerve the puniſhment they endure, Rom. i. 32. but worthineſs in this ſenſe cannot be aſcribed to the heirs of ſalvation by grace.

Nor will it ſuffice to ſay that believers are graciouſly accepted through the merits of Chriſt; doubtleſs the work which the Redeemer finiſhed on his croſs, when he made compleat atonement for ſin, is the deſerving cauſe of his people's fruition of glory, but this does not come up to the terms in the text, for it expreſly declares that they are worthy; theſe very perſons are the real, proper and immediate ſubjects of this worthineſs,

worthineſs, whatever it be. To clear up this point we muſt note, that a perſon may be worthy in reſpect of merit or meetneſs, now, as already hinted, a worthineſs of merit is diſclaimed by the chriſtian, nor can it be decently aſcribed to him in relation to his future inheritance. All the works and ſelf-denial which attend the ſtricteſt profeſſion of godlineſs, or the holieſt converſation, however diſtinguiſhing, exalted or valuable in its place, weighs not a ſingle grain towards the kingdom of heaven. A title to glory lies in the donation of the Father, and in the purchaſe of his Son, in and with whom the ſaints become heirs; it follows that theſe diſciples are declared worthy in reſpect of their meetneſs for glory to come, which appeared in their faith and evangelical obedience. Thus the apoſtle is to be underſtood when he tells the afflicted Theſſalonians, 2 epiſtle i. 5. that their tribulations were with a view to their being counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which they alſo ſuffered. And again, ver. 11. he ſaith, "We pray always for you, that "God would count you worthy of this calling." But how? by reckoning their ſufferings, however great, the meritorious cauſe of their enjoying this kingdom? God forbid we ſhould thus attempt to rob the Redeemer of his glory, in whoſe obedience unto death alone this cauſe is to be found! How then? The anſwer follows: "And "fulfil all the good pleaſure of his goodneſs, and the work "of faith with power." This counting them worthy, therefore, is no other than to finiſh the good work begun in them, and thereby compleat the evidence of their effectual calling, that their real character as ſaints may be manifeſt. By this divine operation and influence

fluence, the faithful perſevere, and even, if required, will reſiſt unto blood; and their ſufferings for righteouſneſs ſake ſhall manifeſt that they are of thoſe to whom the promiſe is given. Now this is the ſenſe in which theſe men of Sardis are ſaid to be worthy, i. e. they appeared by their purity in doctrine and life, amidſt abounding corruption, to be holy perſons, the ſubjects of like precious faith with God's elect, and conſequently Abraham's ſeed, and heirs according to the promiſe. Thus in the laſt and great day the righteous Judge will count, i. e. having compleated his work in his ſaints, he will ſhew them to be worthy; their works of holineſs ſhall prove that they are his diſciples indeed, to the glory of his name, and the ſhame of thoſe who accuſe them.

THUS even in Sardis, when the church in that city was formal and lifeleſs, and her members in general ſadly corrupted, inſomuch that her things were dying away, there was a remnant of excellent perſons, who, by the grace of God, eſcaped the common pollution, and retained their integrity; of theſe the Lord moſt graciouſly condeſcends to bear witneſs unto his ſervant, their paſtor, pronouncing them holy, and worthy, or meet for the reward of the inheritance, and accordingly declares, that having finiſhed their courſe and overcome, they ſhould walk with him in white, or in robes of immortality and light. So then, like Enoch before he was tranſlated, theſe worthies, even in the preſent ſtate, obtain this witneſs that they pleaſed God, which is at once a pledge and vindication of their being admitted to the glories of his everlaſting kingdom.

FROM

FROM this example, we learn that apoſtacy proceeds from corruption. It is owing to the indulgence of the fleſh that men turn aſide from the ways of the Lord. If the ſkirts of thoſe whoſe works are not perfect are expoſed, it will be found that they themſelves are unclean, and the ſource of their ſlumber and hypocriſy will appear. The members of the natural body are not deficient or uſeleſs but through ſome prevailing diſorder, although for a ſeaſon it may not be diſcerned: In like manner, however awhile, church-members may cover their defects with deceitful pretences, it generally turns out that they are cold and unprofitable through a ſecret allowance of ſin; ſome error or luſt is harboured, which, like a worm at the root, eats out their ſtrength. Hence they are ſlothful and partial, as it is written, "Men love not the truth, becauſe "they have pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs;" "where-"fore he ſaith, Awake thou that ſleepeſt, and ariſe "from the dead, and Chriſt ſhall give thee light," Eph. v. 14. An alarm occaſioned by the preſumption of ſome of whom it is ſaid, "It is a ſhame even to "ſpeak of theſe things which are done of them in ſe-"cret." Accordingly ſome error, in principle or practice, lies at the bottom of an unfruitful behaviour under a profeſſion of religion, and unleſs the old leaven is purged out, the hypocrite will increaſe unto more ungodlineſs, till his iniquity is full; and his end is deſtruction.

AT Sardis, as in every city, there was but one goſpel-church, which, conſidering the popularity of the place,

place, and the ſucceſs which had attended the preaching of the word, muſt be ſuppoſed very large, and when ſuch a community became depraved in the degree repreſented, the danger was great, yet a few are preſerved. Thus in the worſt of times the Lord hath a people that fear him. In the old world, when violence covered the earth, Noah was righteous in his ſight; alſo in Sodom pious Lot dwelt; and, what ſaith the Lord to Elias, when he thought himſelf alone? as referred to before: "I have reſerved ſeven thouſand "that have not bowed the knee to Baal." So in the days of Malachi, when ſacrilege and infidelity abounded in Iſrael, we ſhall find perſons who thought on the name of the Lord; and in ages ſince, particularly when antichriſt ſpread through the nations, and the world wandered after the beaſt, witneſſes aroſe who are famed in hiſtory for the noble teſtimony they bore to the truth, through ſufferings, and even at the expence of their blood.

And ſhall the righteous be overlooked or forgotten? Far be it; Jeſus remembers theſe few names in Sardis; he will ever be mindful of thoſe who cleave to him, when others forſake him. The Lord is a God of judgment, and ſeparates the precious from the vile. In an evil time the faithful may lie in obſcurity; they may be driven into corners, or obliged to conceal themſelves, but the eye of the Lord is on them who ſigh and cry for the prevailing abominations, and he will certainly mark them in love; for a ſeaſon they may be in heavineſs, but their ſorrows in the end ſhall turn to their unſpeakable advantage; in the mean time their

ſingular purity and zeal ſhines the brighter, by reaſon of the darkneſs of tranſgreſſors with whom they are cotemporary; beſides ſuch are frequently taken from the evil to come, or hid in the day of God's anger, or it may be they are wonderfully preſerved in the midſt of his judgments; but if he has allotted them to fall with the wicked in a general deſtruction, which is ſometimes the caſe, they are gathered to himſelf, and his promiſe is ſure.

WHAT then is the loſs or ſhame which may attend thoſe who cleave to the Lord, compared with their reward? Holineſs and zeal in a degenerate age, when a lifeleſs profeſſion is current, will expoſe a man to contempt and ill-will; the ungodly will turn upon him, and on every occaſion reproach him; he will be ſure to meet with the reſentment of thoſe who are content with a name; this, joined to ſatan's temptations, and the conflicts he has with his own fleſh, together with his concern for the honor of religion, and in a word, what he feels for thoſe whoſe God is their belly, and who are haſtening to ruin, may at preſent diſtreſs him, but a joyful harveſt of the tears which he ſows to the Spirit is inſured him, he ſhall remember his ſorrows as waters that paſs away, and find that reckoning juſt, that "the ſufferings of this preſent time are not "worthy to be compared with the glory that ſhall be "revealed in the ſaints."

BUT ſhall every one who is advanced to the kingdom of glory, hereafter appear a meet ſubject? ſhall his works be found perfect, and prove his faith and true holineſs

holineſs in the day of revelation? Then the divine purity and juſtice, and every moral perfection of Deity, will be vindicated and honored, in crowning the ſaints with immortality and life; but, what will become of the licentious profeſſor, who preſumes on his religious character, and holds the truth in unrighteouſneſs. Would God there were none of this appearance! But alas, the ſpots which are ſeen on the garments of ſome who call themſelves chriſtians! How are they wandering from God, and making proviſion for the fleſh, to the grief of thoſe with whom they are in communion, while the enemy blaſphemes! Such may have a name that they live, but in the ſight of God and good men they are dead; they live in the pride and pleaſure of life, and are dead while they live; yet they hope to be ſaved, and it highly offends them to queſtion their ſtate. Fatal deluſion; unleſs they repent! The Lord convince ſuch men of their folly and deceit, leſt, overtaken as by a thief in the night, they fall ſhort of the heaven they boaſt, and are covered with ſhame and everlaſting contempt.

And now, chriſtian Reader, doſt thou expect to join in the illuſtrious proceſſion, and to walk in white with the Lord at his coming? doſt thou look for this reward and for a place among the ſaints in the regions of light? then hate and ſhun the appearance of evil; let unbelievers and hypocrites, who have no hope or deſire of this bleſſed inheritance, live as they liſt; their diſorders and licentiouſneſs ſuit their character and end; but thou art a candidate for glory and honor; the leaſt ſtain of ſin is a diſgrace to thy profeſſion. In the pro-

ſpect of triumph with Chriſt, at his appearance and kingdom, the believer is proof againſt every temptation to lukewarmneſs and apoſtacy; it will inſpire his ſoul with reſolution and courage in a ſeaſon of trial, and eſpecially when he attends to the animating aſſurance which follows: "He that overcometh, the ſame ſhall "be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out "his name out of the book of life, but I will confeſs "his name before my Father, and before his angels;" but this will be the ſubject of another lecture.

LECTURE XXV.

The honors decreed the believer in the day of Chriſt; being a deſcription of his white raiment, the book of life, and likewiſe what is implied in not having his name blotted out of that book.

THE plan on which all the epiſtles to the churches in Aſia are formed, among other articles, contains a promiſe to him that overcometh; and in the lecture immediately preceeding, we have ſeen that a glorious reward is laid up for the righteous, an aſſurance of which is repeated with enlargement in the following proclamation, the ſubject of our preſent diſcourſe: "He that overcometh the ſame ſhall be clothed in "white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out "of the book of life; but I will confeſs his name be-"fore my Father and before his angels." A declaration

tion from the throne in the heavens, not only to animate the few whoſe garments were clean, but likewiſe for the encouragement of every convinced backſlider to repent, in confidence of pardon and life: So wonderful is the patience and mercy of God. And the man who can be impenitent under this bleſſed report, is manifeſtly perverſe, and will in the end ſtand ſelf-condemned, and juſtly periſh with the workers of iniquity.

THE promiſe is exceeding punctual with reſpect to its object. *He*, the ſame, that very identical perſon, under whatever age, character, or circumſtances he may fight the good fight, ſhall be clothed with honor and glory. Hence note by the way, that the eye of the Lord is on each nominal chriſtian, and that he will not miſapply the rewards of his grace.

FAITH is a warfare, and every believer comes under the notion of a ſoldier: he may not be an officer, who is ſtationed in the front, and thereby more particularly expoſed to the fire of the enemy; but I ſay every chriſtian is a ſoldier, under the Captain of ſalvation. This is the general character of the faithful: they are all ſwordſmen, and ſhould be expert in this war, that ſubduing their enemies they may triumph at laſt. Thus we have the ſituation, buſineſs and end of the believer in this militant ſtate, he is one that overcometh. To overcome, ſuppoſes powerful and dangerous oppoſition; it carries in it an actual and toilſome conflict, conſiſts with many fears, and even temporary foils; it requires a reſolute perſeverance, and is perfected in final victory. Our text, therefore, is as a trumpet blown in

the midſt of an engagement, while the enemy is puſhing, and threatens, that the believer may be inſpired with courage, and conquer.

THE powers againſt whom the chriſtian is engaged, are known to be the world, the fleſh and the devil; but, alas, in appearance this knowledge is often meer ſpeculation. Can a juſt idea of theſe ſubtle and vigilant forces, admit of the wanton and careleſs manner which prevails in the conduct of many? Surely, if we really apprehended danger from ſo many quarters we ſhould be more on our guard. Theſe enemies are uncertain and various in their manner, but there is no place, character, or circumſtances, in civil or religious life, ſecure from their attempt to injure and deſtroy. *Now* the trial is more ſenſible from one of theſe parties, and *then* from another, and frequently they are both to be diſcerned in the attack; however their intereſt is united, they are ſubſervient to each other, and their view is the ſame; to conquer and ruin. In moſt temptations ſatan is the principal, the fleſh gives occaſion, and the world affords the materials. In a word, there is an endleſs change in the meaſures taken by theſe reſtleſs adverſaries, as permitted, according to the different ſituation of the believer, or ſtate of the viſible church in his day. Sometimes ſatan ranges as a roaring lion, he comes down, as in the days of perſecution, 1 Pet. v. 8. At another time, like a ſerpent, as when he enticed mother Eve, he corrupts in a more imperceptible, but not leſs effectual manner: Then his artillery are not deprivation of goods, exile, fire and ſword, but by heriſies, deluſions, and ſnares of this world, of which he is the god;

god; he inſinuates and deceives men into lukewarmneſs and diſorder, till the example of formal profeſſors are more than ſufficient to anſwer his end. And thus it often comes to paſs, as at Sardis, that a people have a name that they live, when, alas, in truth they are dead, and are in danger of being overtaken in judgment by an offended God, who is jealous of his glory, and whoſe anger is more to be dreaded, than all the malice and power of men or devils, who would turn us aſide from his ways. Whether there are any ſymptoms of the like condition on the Proteſtant churches, at home or abroad, in the preſent day, the Reader will judge: But when this is the caſe, the upright are under peculiar temptations, from the number of apoſtates, ſome of whom may have been famous for their ſeeming knowledge and zeal for religion: They are likewiſe in danger from the ſpecious ſhew of time-ſerving men, who often make a ſound of liberty, charity, goodneſs and virtue, but at the ſame time they are full of all ſubtlety and miſchief, to captivate men from the faith, experience and order of the goſpel. Moreover, the ill treatment which the faithful ſometimes meet with for their ſtedfaſtneſs, by thoſe who fall in with the corruption of the times, the burthen laid on them, through the deficiency of others, with whom they are connected in ſociety, their fears of being overcome, and it may be of a total diſſolution of the church in the place where they dwell; theſe, and other things that time would fail to mention, are a ſore trial to them who love God, in a day of general declenſion. "Bleſs-
"ed is he that endureth to the end: He that over-
"cometh, the ſame ſhall be clothed in white raiment;

" and I will not blot out his name out of the book of " life, but I will confeſs his name before my Father and " before his angels." A glorious promiſe, which Jeſus himſelf ſtands engaged to fulfil! It is laid out in three diſtinct branches; they correſpond with each other, and together yield a moſt animating proſpect, of the honor of the ſaints, at the coming of the Lord. The two firſt are highly figurative, and are explained by the laſt, which runs in plain language.

1. It is declared, that the victorious ſaint " ſhall " be clothed in white raiment." The ſame metaphor occurred in the foregoing lecture, in which it was noted, that *white* is an emblem of purity, glory, conqueſt and joy. Thus, Rev. xv. 6. " the angels came out of " the temple with the vials of wrath, clothed in pure " and white linen," in token of their holineſs and ſplendor. For the ſame reaſon, chap. iv. 4. " the " four and twenty elders ſit round about the throne " clothed in white raiment, with crowns of gold on " their heads." And further, as hinted, it was the ancient cuſtom to make triumphal proceſſion in white: To which agrees, Rev. vi. 2. The Captain of ſalvation, the Lord of hoſts, is beheld " on a white horſe, with " a bow in his hand, when a crown was given him, " on which he went forth conquering and to conquer." And in chap. xix. 14. the armies that followed him are alſo inveſted in white. Once more, to the ſame purpoſe alſo is chap. vii. 11. " John beheld, and lo, a " multitude ſtood before the throne and before the " Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their " hands;" which is another eſtabliſhed token of victory,

tory. Some indeed confine this to the martyrs, who, on account of their ſufferings for Chriſt, may be ſaid to "have waſhed their robes, and made them white in "the blood of the Lamb," and ſtile it the enſign of martyrs; but, with ſubmiſſion, however the phraſe may be peculiarly adapted to thoſe who ſealed the teſtimony of Jeſus with their blood, it is not confined to them; there is indeed a noble army of witneſſes to the truth, who ſhine in the kingdom of glory, and whoſe crowns may be of ſingular luſtre, but the viſion ſeems rather to comprehend all the redeemed who have attained the heavenly ſtate. However, there is another way of being waſhed in the blood of the Lamb, beſides that of martyrdom, and without which even the martyrs themſelves could not ſtand before God in his temple above; and it is certain, that the promiſe under conſideration hath reſpect to the faithful, whoſe ſufferings and trials aroſe from a different quarter than that of perſecution.

If one ſtate is intended by the whole of the promiſe, which will ſcarce be denied, it cannot terminate in any future period of the church on earth, as ſome are of opinion; the finiſhing clauſe manifeſtly refers to the day of revelation, when the ſaints ſhall appear with their illuſtrious Head in a glorious manner. 1. As inveſted with the robe of righteouſneſs brought in by the Meſſiah, when he made reconciliation for iniquity by his obedience to the death of the croſs. This is fitly compared to white raiment, Rev. iii. 18. for its infinite purity and ineffable glory, being the righteouſneſs of a divine perſon, though wrought in and by the human

man nature, which he aſſumed, in order to redeem us. This ſpotleſs robe is now upon every one that believeth, Rom. iii. 22. in which he ſtands juſtified, and perfectly comely in the ſight of God, like Joſhua the prieſt, Zech. iii. 4. his iniquity is paſſed away, and he is clothed with change of raiment, no charge can lie againſt him, Rom. viii. 1. Thus the church is deſcribed; "Her cloathing is of wrought gold, maſſy and "bright," Pſalm xlv. 13. And ſometimes the chriſtian can rejoice in his God, beholding himſelf herein decked as a prieſt, and adorned as a bride with her jewels; yet this is not always the caſe, a believer may be in the dark, and doubt his own ſtate, but when Jeſus is revealed from heaven, his ſaints ſhall be arrayed in this garment of ſalvation, and ſhall find themſelves honorably acquitted in the preſence of all. But, 2. Another branch of his glory will be the beauty of holineſs: "The King's daughter is likewiſe all glorious within." A perfection in holineſs is laid up in the hope of the goſpel; it is the earneſt deſire and expectation of every true chriſtian, and towards which ſome make greater advances in the preſent ſtate than others; at beſt he is deficient, but in the future world his ſpirit is made perfect; and when he comes with his Saviour from heaven, his whole ſpirit, ſoul and body will be wholly ſanctified, he ſhall appear blameleſs and without fault: ſo that his righteouſneſs in this ſenſe will break forth as the light, the ſplendor of which will cover his malicious accuſers with ſhame at the reſurrection. For, 3. The chriſtian will be clothed with white in reſpect of his glorified body. We have ſeen the raiment of Jeſus on the mount was white as light; a figure and

earneſt

earneſt of his future glory, when riſen from the dead; and to this we know his ſaints will be conformed, Rom. viii. 29. Phil. iii. 21. "for we ſhall ſee him as "he is," 1 John iii. 2. Of this bleſſed hope, the reſurrection of Jeſus is an infallible pledge, 1 Cor. xv. Now the chriſtian may be ſaid to be clothed with vile raiment in reſpect of his ſinful and mortal body, but when it is faſhioned like that in which his Saviour ſits at the right hand of God, it will be an eſſential part of his glory. Finally, The luſtre of each believer will, I apprehend, greatly ariſe from his viſible union in the church, unto Jeſus the head, and to every member of his glorious and myſtical body, who will then appear in their brighteſt apparel before the Father and his angels; then will the ſaint that overcometh, ſit down with his Lord in his throne, in exceeding white raiment, with all the enſigns of victory and triumph, and with him enter the kingdom, where the wiſe ſhall ſhine as the ſun in the firmament, and as the ſtars, for ever and ever. Theſe are the ſhining garments which the ſons of Zion ſhall put on in the day of the Lord; they ſhall be inveſted with the righteouſneſs of their Redeemer, as with gold; the fine linen of perfect and ſpotleſs purity ſhall adorn them, their bodies ſhall then be ſpiritual and glorious; and further, they ſhall be clothed in robes of everlaſting light, as members of Chriſt and one another, who have gained a total and final victory over all their enemies, and are crowned with honor in the eternal kingdom of the Father. In one word, then ſhall come to paſs that ſaying, "He will beautify the meek with ſalva-"tion."

We now come to the ſecond branch of the promiſe; "And I will not blot out his name out of the book of "life." As hinted already, theſe are figurative terms, and they plainly allude in general to a well-known inſtrument, in which things are noted down to be brought to remembrance as occaſion requires, and particularly to the uſe of books in a court of judicature, where cauſes are tried and determined. Our concern in attending unto them, is to avoid every idea unworthy of God, or of divine revelation: With this caution I attempt to ſhew from the ſcripture, our only ſure guide, what may be underſtood by the book of life, and the import of this promiſe, namely, that Chriſt will not blot out the believer's name out of his book.

Daniel, chap. vii. relates his viſion of the Father, who is ſtiled "The Ancient of days;" by whom he ſaw all judgment committed to the Son of man, who alſo appeared with the clouds of heaven. A grand and awful viſion, which enters deeply into the myſtery of God! The prophet declares, that "the judgment was "ſet, and the books were opened." The like ſcene is preſented to John in the iſle of Patmos, Rev. xx. 12. "I "ſaw the dead, ſmall and great, ſtand before God, and "the books were opened;" not that we are to ſuppoſe that, properly ſpeaking, books will be wanted, or uſed at the tribunal of Chriſt; he is not like earthly judges, unto whom, as obſerved, the alluſion is made, who, with all their ſuperior ability, ſtand in need of ſuch means to aſſiſt and direct them: the infinite underſtanding, and other perfections of the divine Jeſus, who is judge,

judge, forbid this low conception; before him all things are preſent and naked from the end to the beginning; no witneſſes, no records are needful, no; he hath ability in himſelf to execute his important commiſſion, and not a man ſhall have cauſe to complain of his judgment, or be able to appeal from his bar. Yet this is the repeated language of ſcripture, the books ſhall be opened, and ſomething no doubt is referred to by this term, which demands our attention; we may therefore ſoberly enquire, What are theſe books? I anſwer, in general, every object ſenſible or ſpiritual, which the Holy Ghoſt has thought fit, directly or indirectly, to preſent to our view under the notion of a book, may be juſtly numbered among thoſe that ſhall be opened in the day of judgment; it will therefore be pertinent to mention theſe books, at leaſt the principal ones, in our way to that expreſſed in this promiſe. And, 1. In Pſalm xix. univerſal nature is compared to a book, which declares and ſpeaks as it were, in words or lines, the exiſtence, infinite wiſdom, and other perfections of its glorious Author. This extenſive volume contains the viſible heavens and earth, with all its amazing furniture and innumerable inhabitants; it lies open for the inſtruction of man, and to put him in remembrance, that, beholding the eternal power and godhead therein expreſſed, he might adore and ſerve his bounteous Creator and Lord; by this the heathen ſtand condemned for their idolatry and immoral behaviour, Rom. ii. 1. And again, Conſcience is another thing repreſented as retaining to the view of man things paſt or preſent; it generally ſpeaks now to every man; but if, through the indulgence of ſin, the tranſ-

greſſor

greſſor is ſeared, or finally impenitent, and this book is ſhut, it will open at the tribunal of God to his confuſion and condemnation for ever. There is likewiſe the book of ſcripture; that ſolemn guard on the ſacred writing, Rev. xxii. 18. ſtiled the words of the prophecy of this book, is not to be confined to that which is commonly called, The book of the revelation of St. John the divine, but is to be extended to the oracles of God, without any exception. This code contains the books of Moſes, the pſalms, and the prophets, and likewiſe the evangeliſts, the Acts, and every epiſtle of the New-Teſtament, out of which thoſe ſhall be judged who enjoy the benefit of divine revelation. And further, we read of the book of the law, I mean the covenant of works, which whether conſidered as written in the heart, or exhibited under the diſpenſation of Moſes, demands particular notice; in this dreadful book every tranſgreſſor is written accurſed, Gal. iii. 10. It is a miniſtration of condemnation and death to every man who is under the law, and no doubt this will alſo be opened when the judgment is ſet, when all that are in it ſhall periſh with a miſerable deſtruction: But, here is another book ſtill, which is pointed to in the promiſe before us, namely, the book of life; this book or roll, we are expreſly told, will be unfolded, and that it will appear diſtinct from, and after all the reſt, Rev. xx. 12. "And another book was opened, which "is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of "thoſe things which were written in the book, &c." Paul ſpeaks of this book, Phil. iv. 3. and mentions ſome perſons whoſe names he was perſuaded were in it. We alſo read, Rev. xiii. 8. of them that worſhipped the beaſt,

beaſt, that their names are not written in the book of life, and the ſame is referred to in ſeveral other places. Now, what is intended in divine revelation by this important and intereſting book? There is a record in heaven concerning the ſpirit and conduct of the faithful, which is ſtiled in Mal. iii. 17. a "book of remembrance," and ſaid to be written before the Lord for them that feared him; of which in a ſubſequent lecture. God is not unrighteous to forget the love of his ſaints, but will remember their works in the day of account; but I apprehend this book of life is no other than the roll of electing love, or, in other words, the decrees of God concerning his choſen and redeemed among men; in proof of this I ſhall ſhew that the decrees of the Almighty in general, and conſequently thoſe which relate to the counſels of his mercy in particular, are mentioned under the idea of a book, and then point out ſome circumſtances revealed concerning the book of life, which is the ſubject in hand.

NOTHING can be more clear than that the ſecret purpoſe or decree of God, in reference to nature and providence, are repreſented under the notion of being written in a book. In reference to our natural frame, ſays David, Pſalm cxxxix. 16. "Thine eyes did ſee "my ſubſtance yet being imperfect, and in thy book "all my members were written," i. e. determined or decreed, before thou gaveſt them actual exiſtence. The ſame may be obſerved in reſpect of providence. Remarkable to this purpoſe is the paſſage in Daniel, chap. x. 21. to which I crave the Reader's attention. The angel

angel ſays to the prophet, "I will ſhew thee that "which is noted in the ſcripture of truth." This agrees with the property of a book in which things are noted. Now the *ſcripture of truth* in Daniel cannot be underſtood of the written word in his time, for the prophet was well acquainted with all divine revelation then extant; and it is manifeſt that the angel refers to an event yet to come, and which hitherto lay concealed in the boſom of the Father; here is therefore an undoubted inſtance of the ſecret purpoſe of God being repreſented as it were noted before him in a book; and doth not this prove the doctrine of predeſtination, which ſome men blaſpheme? Indeed the election of God lies at the foundation of all the grace communicated to any of fallen Adam's race from the beginning, in time, and in the glories of eternity; and if the decrees of God may be conſidered as a book which contains all his purpoſe and counſel in reference to creation and providence, there is no reaſon againſt conceiving in like manner of the things which concern the ſtill more wonderful work of redemption. In this book of life are written all things relating to the ſalvation of the elect, and particularly the certain objects of that foreknowledge, or love, which was diſplayed in their appointment to glory by Jeſus Chriſt; nor is it ſtrange that he who recorded the various parts of the human body before it was formed ſhould note, as in a book before him, all the members of that myſtical body, the church, who ſhall enjoy him for ever; they are "veſ-"ſels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glo-"ry," Rom. ix. 23. Their names are in this book of

of decree, yea, doubtleſs ſtrictly and literally, as hinted before *, the very names by which they are known in this life are included, for in ſome inſtances, as in Joſiah and Cyrus, proper names of perſons were expreſly revealed, even centuries before they were born; but this is not peculiar to the choſen, nor inſiſted on here; the phraſe is metaphorical, and it is enough that the heirs of ſalvation are marked in this book, and that, being found written therein in the day of judgment, they will then take poſſeſſion of the kingdom prepared for thoſe whom the Father hath bleſſed, from the foundation of the world.

NOR is ſcripture ſilent or even ſparing concerning this wonderful and intereſting volume. We read in Luke x. 20. that the names of the ſaints are written in heaven; and again, Heb. xii. 23. that the church of the firſt-born, i. e. the names or perſons that make up that general aſſembly, are written or enrolled in heaven ‡, which is thought to allude to the enrollment of the firſt-born of literal Iſrael, Numb. iii. 40. However it is well known that the ancients wrote on rolls of parchment; now this roll or book muſt needs be originally in heaven, ſince it exiſted from eternity, which is the next thing recorded; Rev. xvii. 8. the book of life is ſaid to be "from the foundation of the world." Moreover in chap. xxi. 17. it is ſtiled "the Lamb's "book of life." And in chap. xiii. 8. theſe criterions are united; where we read of ſome whoſe names are not written in "the book of life, of the Lamb ſlain "from the foundation of the world." A paſſage which

 throws

* Page 389. ‡ Dr. Owen on the place.

throws a light on this divine code, and agrees with the current of prophecy, the general ſubject of this book is no other than the redemption of the elect by the blood of God's Son, whoſe name is at the head of the choſen, as the firſt-born among many brethren, predeſtinated to the adoption of children by him, and coheirs with him in the heavenly inheritance, to be enjoyed on the completion of his ſuretiſhip-engagements, one eſſential branch of which was the expiation of ſin. Hence, when the Redeemer appeared to put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf, he ſaith, "Lo I come (in the "VOLUME OF THE BOOK, it is written of me) to do "thy will, O God." In the volume κεφαλιδι, i. e. in the head of the book, or roll, it is written of me; they who would confine it to the written word, or to the writings of Moſes, which is emphatically ſtiled *the book*, by the Jews, apply this to the firſt promiſe, Gen. iii. 15. But, I think this addreſs of the Son to the Father is juſtly conſidered as ultimately referring to the covenant of redemption, in which divine compact he ſolemnly engaged to die for the ſins of the people; certain it is that the ſufferings and death of Chriſt were particularly noted in this eternal volume of decrees, for we have ſeen that he was "delivered "according to the determinate counſel and foreknow-"ledge of God." From this ancient record, treaſured up in the archives of heaven, previous to the commencement of time, the book of revelation is drawn, even the whole goſpel, which is a record of eternal life, promiſed in Chriſt before the world began. So then this idea of the decrees of the Almighty is afforded in ſcripture, they are noted as in a book before him,

him, and the book of life in particular appears to be the ſame with the Lamb's book of life, which is frequently mentioned, and which contains the names of the elect, and the methods of infinite wiſdom in bringing them to glory by the ſufferings of Jeſus, the only begotten of the Father. And ſurely, my Reader, if the divine decrees in general are in ſcripture compared to a book, as you have ſeen, thoſe which concern the ſalvation of the church in Chriſt may well be ſtiled ſo, with this ſingular and illuſtrious epithet, the book of life.

Now the Lord declares concerning him that overcometh, ſaying, "I will not blot out his name out of "the book of life." It appears, in Rev. xx. 15. that, in the judgment to come, whoever is not found written in the book of life, will be caſt into the lake of fire; this part of the promiſe therefore proves that an intereſt therein is of the utmoſt importance. I am ſenſible that ſome ſay, that to have a name written in heaven, is only to have a preſent right to the inheritance by virtue of our faith, which, they ſuppoſe, may be loſt. This groundleſs and uncomfortable notion is induced from a prejudice againſt the doctrine of election, and that of the final perſeverance of the ſaints, but ſuch do well to conſider the following particulars: 1. That nothing can be more evident than it is from the ſcripture, that God hath a people choſen unto ſalvation in Chriſt Jeſus his Son, and that by this line of election all ſpiritual bleſſings are directed, and deſcend on any of the children of men, Eph. i. 4. 2 Theſſ. i. 13. 2. A title to

the inheritance of the ſaints, though it be received *by* faith, is not grounded *in* faith, but originally in the donation of the Father; and the believer's right to the poſſeſſion and enjoyment, is derived from the merit of the Son, through whoſe blood it deſcends to them who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation, in a way of righteouſneſs; this is the truth and the glory of the goſpel; the inheritance is by promiſe, as to Abraham, and the fruition of the faithful in time and eternity is not of debt, but of grace, Rom. v. 21. Eph. i. 14. Beſides, 3. It is highly indecent to imagine that the immutable and eternal God ſhall change his purpoſe, or repent of his gift, or, to ſpeak freely according to the figure of this paſſage, that he ſhould write any man in this book, and then blot him out again, and ſo vice verſa, as he riſes or falls in the obedience of faith, not to ſay, that if the divine Advocate with the Father prevails, the faith of his people cannot totally and finally fail, Luke xxii. 32. Again, 4. This ſtrange notion contradicts the word and oath of the moſt High, who hath revealed unto the heirs of ſalvation the immutability of his counſel, which is their ſtrong conſolation, Heb. vi. 17, 18. And further, this conceit is inconſiſtent with a full aſſurance of hope, and leaves no room for the believer's rejoicing that his name is written in heaven, which our Lord himſelf recommends to his diſciples, Luke x. 20. In a word, this imagination directly oppoſes the tenor of the goſpel-report, which runs in theſe abſolute terms: "He that believeth and is bap-"tized, ſhall be ſaved." Thus it appears, that to aſſert that an elect perſon, who is redeemed and called according

according to the purpoſe of God, is liable to an eraſement from the Lamb's book of life, or that the Lord will blot him out from thence, is to deny the teſtimony of God, to impeach his perfections, and to make an attempt on the foundations of the righteous; but we know it is vain, for the counſel of the Lord ſhall ſtand. As to the phraſe in this place, that the Lord will not blot out the believer's name out of the book of life, it is purely figurative, and, according to the alluſion, amounts to this, and no more, namely, that in the end, when this important volume is opened, he ſhall certainly be found written therein; or in other words, that the man who overcomes will appear in the future judgment bleſſed of the Father, who hath given him the victory, and that he ſhall accordingly be admitted to the honors and triumphs of the redeemed in that day: And, what more can the chriſtian deſire? It is a glory which will infinitely ſurpaſs his utmoſt preſent conception.

THE light in which we have conſidered theſe metaphorical branches of the promiſe, is confirmed by the following ſentence, with which it concludes: "but I "will confeſs his name before my Father, and before "his angels." This ſettles the period of its accompliſhment, namely, the laſt and great day, when the Son of man ſhall be revealed from heaven to judge the world, for it is manifeſt from Matt. xxv. and many other parts of the New-Teſtament, that then the righteous will be owned by the Lord; and in theſe words to confeſs his name, being ſet in oppoſition to his blotting it out of the book of life, determines the ſenſe

of that difficult phraſe, for by this antitheſis it appears, that when Jeſus ſays, I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, he intends preciſely this, namely, that he would acknowledge him at his appearance and kingdom. To be blotted out of the book of life when the judgment is ſet, is not to be found written therein, Rev. xx. 15. and poſitively conſiſts in being rejected and diſowned by the Judge, as all the workers of iniquity will be; but, on the contrary, Chriſt in this promiſe engages to own and honor his victorious ſaint, he will not deny, but confeſs his name; he will declare his righteouſneſs, own him to be a ſon, and an heir of ſalvation and life.

THIS is the ſum; every man that holds faſt his profeſſion, and overcomes in the end, as the real chriſtian moſt certainly will, the ſame ſhall be found written in the Lamb's book of life at the day of judgment; Chriſt will then own him to be choſen and faithful, on which a glory ſhall be revealed upon him anſwerable to a triumph; yea, far exceeding the moſt beautiful diadem placed on the head of the greateſt conqueror or prince of the earth, even a crown of glory which fadeth not away.

NOW, the man muſt be hardened indeed, who can queſtion the importance of being in this book, or remain indifferent whether or not his name is found there. But, Reader, doſt thou inquire for thyſelf? Look; hath the goſpel reached thy heart, and reduced thee to the obedience of faith? doſt thou believe on the name of the Son of God, and hath his Spirit made the

the word effectual to thy repentance, and brought thee to rely on Jeſus as thy Lord and thy God? Thou mayeſt then rejoice that thy name is written in heaven, 1 Theſſ. i. 4. This ground is ſure. Think not, enquiring ſoul, to aſcend up to heaven and there enter the boſom, or ſearch the eternal record of the Father, it is a fruitleſs attempt, and needleſs; that book will not be fully opened to any creature till the day of revelation, but there is a tranſcript ſufficient on earth to ſatisfy him that is conformed to the goſpel of Chriſt; deſcend into thine heart, and compare thy experience with that divine ſtandard. Dwells the love of God there? Is his law in thine heart? Fear not. A conſcience purified from the love and allowance of ſin, and poſſeſſed of an hope in the ſalvation of God, is an undeniable effect of that power of the Holy Ghoſt, which leaves no room to doubt that the ſubject is enrolled in the Lamb's book of life: "Whom he did predeſtinate, "them he alſo called," Rom. viii. 30. This is the only ſafe rule; other methods of judging thy ſtate may amuſe but deceive thee; thy attainments, thy profeſſion, thy name for religion are no certain criterions, much leſs doth this knowledge depend on viſions and private revelations, imaginary or real, but if the deſire of thy ſoul is to the name of the Lord, and to the remembrance thereof, thou mayeſt ſafely conclude that his deſire is to thee, and that thou art numbered with his ſaints.

And, art thou acquainted with this power of the goſpel in thy heart, my dear Friend? mayeſt thou conclude that, unworthy as thou art, thy name is written

in heaven? then let me intreat thee, dwell much on the glory contained in this promiſe; be not conformed to this world; and if thou art under ſore trials, or ſuffering for righteouſneſs ſake, let the honor and triumph of the ſaints, when Jeſus ſhall appear, inſpire thee with courage; ſhun not a teſtimony for the Lord in the way of his appointment; remember that not to own Chriſt is to deny him, and the man who will not confeſs him lets go the promiſe of this glorious reward unto them who obey him; then be not aſhamed of the name of thy Saviour in the ſight of an unbelieving world, or to live up to thy holy profeſſion, in the midſt of the diſorders that prevail in a ſinful generation, this is unworthy thy character and hope; therefore caſt off the works of darkneſs, and put on the ar- armour of light, in a certain expectation of being crowned in the day of the Lord, when ſhame ſhall cover thine enemy, with all who forget God and deſpiſe the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. "Behold he comes "quickly, and his reward is with him, to give every "man according as his work ſhall be," Rev. xxii. 12. In a word, attend to the exhortation, which concludes this and the other epiſtles to the diſciples in Aſia, "He "that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit ſaith "to the churches." With the opening of which we ſhall finiſh our deſign on this ſubject.

LECTURE

LECTURE XXVI.

The univerſal obligation of chriſtians to attend to the voice of the Spirit.

THE epiſtle to Sardis cloſes, like the reſt, with a ſolemn excitation to hearken to the Spirit. "He "that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit ſaith "to the churches." A like exhortation is repeated by our Lord in the courſe of his miniſtry, and is always needful, ſince they who are endowed with this diſtinguiſhing faculty are liable to be dull, which is a caſe too frequent to admit of debate. Some take the paſſage as expreſſive of the conſequence of the word being preached, namely, that then, the man that hath an ear will certainly hear; but experience denies it.

OUR text is a demand on him that hath an ear, who is directed to hear what the Spirit ſaith to the churches; i. e. in his epiſtles to the churches in Aſia, which no doubt is to be regarded by the faithful to the end of the world, yet the phraſe will admit of a more comprehenſive idea, and may be juſtly applied to the whole of divine revelation.

THE exiſtence, office and operations of the Spirit, are ſo much the ſubject of ſcripture, that one might have hoped for an unity of faith concerning him, but alas, many are the fancies advanced againſt the dignity of his perſon

perſon and grace. Some nominal chriſtians intend by the Spirit no other than natural conſcience, or the inward light of human reaſon; and if this is thy notion, my Reader, take heed, leſt "the light that is in thee "be darkneſs." Others conceive of the Spirit as a meer quality in the divine Being, and ſtile him the virtue, influence or power of God; but theſe are low and falſe conceptions, which contradict the ſcripture-account of the Holy Ghoſt, whoſe perſonality is ſo fully ſet forth in thoſe ſacred writings, that even ſome who ſtumble at the adorable Trinity, overborn with the evidence thereof, are compelled to confeſs it, and have recourſe to a ſtupid and vain imagination *, that he is ſome eminent angel or created ſpirit, who on account of his highneſs and intimacy with God, was ſingled out and ſent from heaven to ſanctify the church; this ſtrange conceit ſhews the wretched ſhift to which men are driven when they leave the teſtimony the Lord hath given of himſelf. The perſonality and deity of the Spirit are manifeſt in the word, in which there are aſcribed to him, in numberleſs inſtances, underſtanding, will, power, and every thing eſſential to an intelligent voluntary agent, which compleat the idea of a perſon; and his divinity is clear from his being joined with the Father and the Son, with whom he bears record in heaven, 1 John v. 7. and alſo is worſhipped, particularly in baptiſm, Matt. xxviii. 19. His proper deity and diſtinct perſonality are clear in the inſtance of Peter's rebuke of Ananias, who declares that he had lied to the Holy Ghoſt, and that in ſo doing he had not lied unto man, but unto God, Acts v. 3, 4. Now this

* Dr. Owen on the Spirit, p. 46,

this glorious divine Spirit, thus equal in nature with the Father and Son, from whom he proceeds, appears to be the great agent of the covenant, whoſe operations are needful and effectual to accompliſh the purpoſe of grace in the ſalvation of the choſen, in a ſubſerviency to which he moved the prophets, 2 Pet. i. 21. who ſpake by him the counſel of God. "All ſcripture is given by inſpiration of God;" and this is never aſcribed to the Father or the Son, but to the Spirit alone, by whom the Son himſelf propheſied when he miniſtred on earth, "He whom God ſent ſpeaketh God's words, for God "giveth not the Spirit by meaſure to him," John iii. 34. Thus the Spirit is the author of ſcripture, when, or by whomſoever it was uttered, not excepting the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. So then the whole of divine revelation is his voice, which voice is to the churches, for though ſome things were originally directed to particular perſons, or to mankind in general, yet it was in the church the Spirit ſpake by the mouth of his ſervants, and whatever is written is for the univerſal learning, patience and hope of the faithful, Rom. xv. 4. And moreover to the church hath been committed theſe oracles of God, as of old to the Jews; and ſince the goſpel has been eſtabliſhed, ſcripture, under a wiſe and wonderful providence by the will of God, has not been left in private hands; and neither Jews nor Gentiles have been unfaithful to their truſt; the former, although ſadly corrupted and ſunk ſo low, through ignorance and vice, that they knew not the voice of Moſes and the prophets, read in their ſynagogue every ſabbath, Acts xiii. 27. yet it is notorious that they ſcrupulouſly adhered to the letter of ſcripture, and are never

ver charged with altering it in any one inſtance; and with reſpect to the chriſtian church, even the unhappy diviſions, and oppoſite ſentiments of its nominal members, have been ſubſervient to the keeping them entire, each party, having a jealous eye over the other; it has been out of the power of either to alter ſcripture in favor of their own particular ſcheme. Thus what the Spirit ſaith he ſaith to all the churches, even to every church and to each of her members, who are therefore every one required to hear; for ſacred propheſy is not a dead letter, which is now ſilent and paſt, but the lively oracles of God, even the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever, Acts vii. 38. 1 Pet. i. 23. compared.

But what is this ear with which a man muſt or can hear the voice of the Spirit? No doubt, as obſerved, it is a diſtinguiſhing talent. If an ear, in the ſenſe of this paſſage, was common or univerſal, the form of the text would be impertinent. What then is this ear? The fleſhly ear, or organ of natural ſenſe, is out of the queſtion, being common to all who dwell in the body; beſides, the object to be regarded is moral or ſpiritual, the faculty therefore muſt be intellectual. It may be uſeful to note by the way, that to have an ear in a natural ſenſe, is to have that uſeful member perfect and clear, which, through one or another occaſion, may be obſtructed. The ears of ſome men are dull, they are in a manner ſtopped; that curious membrane is ſo out of tone that the ſubject can hear but little, yea it may be nothing at all, which is very diſcomfiting, particularly to them that have known the

the pleaſure of ſound. To be totally deaf, is inconvenient and dangerous, and a trial to the chriſtian, particularly on this account, that it deprives him of hearing the word of the Lord, a principal means of his comfort. Thanks be to God, there are other ways of hearing the voice of the Spirit than that of attending to the word preached; nevertheleſs it is a great affliction to him that delights in the teſtimonies of the Lord to be prevented from hearing them publiſhed in his name.

THIS ear is no other than an ability of ſoul or heart to praiſe and embrace the voice of the Spirit, or a capacity for diſcerning ſpiritual objects, which the natural man hath not. It is not the natural underſtanding of any man, however cultivated or enlarged. Man, as a reaſonable creature, with proper aſſiſtance, may underſtand the words of ſcripture, he may perceive the doctrines they contain, and alſo diſcover the juſt connexion and harmony of goſpel truth, and at the ſame time fall ſhort of this divine faculty: neither is it an ability for diſcourſing on points of faith to public edification, which is a ſingular talent. The ear we now ſpeak of is common to regenerate perſons, who being ſavingly enlightened, can diſtinguiſh the glory and importance of the goſpel, and cordially embrace it, as when the heart of Lydia was opened ſhe attended to the things which were ſpoken by Paul. A certain writer, who is not to be ſuſpected of undervaluing human power or attainments, thus defines it: 'It is, ſays he, 'a good inclination to, and a good judgment and per-'ception of divine things, ſo as thoroughly to weigh

'and

'and conſider what is ſpoke:' All which are certainly included, for we ſhall preſently ſee, that in the uſe of the ſpiritual ear, every power is engaged; but, if the ſcripture is true, it is impoſſible that the natural man ſhould thus know the things of the Spirit of God, 1 Cor. ii 14. a vail of ignorance and prejudice covers his mind; nor is one man by nature better diſpoſed or more capable than another of attaining to this: It is for want of conſidering the bad moral ſtate of fallen man, that any, in oppoſition to the teſtimony of God, conceit that the fine ſenſe, liberal education, or any other comparative excellency, in an unregenerate ſtate, brings the ſubject a jot, nearer to this divine ſenſe, the wiſeſt and nobleſt of the world are as far off from it as the fooliſh and vulgar; there is no foundation for this capacity in the carnal mind; and if the ſinner cannot, with the greateſt external advantages, attain the true idea or diſcernment of ſpiritual things, much leſs can he apply them to himſelf. What our Lord ſaid to the Jews, John viii. 43. may juſtly be applied to natural men without any exception, "Why do ye not under-"ſtand my ſpeech? even becauſe ye *cannot* hear my "word." Carnal reaſonings and pride blindeth the eyes of the ſinner, and fill him with inſuperable prejudices againſt the ſpirituality and purity of the goſpel; till theſe are removed he is not able to diſtinguiſh their excellency or reliſh their ſweetneſs. So then this ear is not any ſpeculation or human attainment, however refined or exalted, but a ſupernatural and experimental thing of the Spirit of God. The phraſe, even when applied to a capacity for natural hearing in the common ſenſe of mankind, conveys an idea of ſomething extra-

ordinary,

ordinary, to have an ear for muſic: What is it leſs than to have a diſtinguiſhing judgment and taſte for the harmony of ſounds, which yield the ſubject unſpeakable pleaſure? But will any deny that this is a peculiar talent, a kind of perſonal ſenſe, which is not to be acquired or deſcribed, though it may be greatly improved? A perſon muſt be naturally formed for delighting in muſic: In like manner no man can feel the happineſs of knowing the joyful ſound till Chriſt is formed in him, or he is a new creature. This hearing ear is the ſpecial gift and work of the Lord, Prov. xx. 12. which he beſtows at his ſovereign pleaſure: Hence ſays Moſes to rebellious Iſrael, "The Lord hath not given you "an heart to perceive, and eyes to ſee, and ears to "hear unto this day," Deut. xxix. 4. In a word, the neceſſity of regeneration, in order to hearing the Spirit, is evident from our Saviour's declaration, "He "that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore "hear them not becauſe ye are not of God," John viii. 47.

To hear in general, is to exert this diſtinguiſhing faculty, in attending to the things of divine revelation; and it implies a diligent ſearch into the mind of the Spirit. "Let him hear;" i. e. let him exerciſe his ſpiritual ſenſes that he may perceive the mind of the Holy Ghoſt, and attain a juſt conception of divine things, till he arrives to a full aſſurance of underſtanding in the myſtery of God. Now he that doth this will embrace every opportunity for hearing, reading, meditation and prayer. It alſo carries in it a ſerious reflection on the excellency and importance of what he diſcerns, that his

his heart may be duly and conſtantly affected. And further, this hearing is to be extended to practice. The man who doth not conform to the orders of his ſuperior, can in no proper or honorable ſenſe be ſaid to hear him; nor can that man be eſteemed a hearer of the Spirit, whoſe temper and conduct are not conformed to his dictates; without aiming at this, or indeed unleſs this is in a good meaſure attained, all pretence to hearing the Spirit is vain: for a man to talk of hearing what the Spirit ſaith to the churches, and live in pride and ſenſual pleaſure, or go on in a courſe of diſorder and ſin, is to mock the Almighty, or rather to deceive his own ſoul, for God is not mocked. In ſhort, to hear in the ſenſe of this exhortation, comprehends the whole obedience of faith.

SOME reſolve this ſpiritual ear into a holy deſire, or purpoſe of heart to attend to the voice of God, and give the ſenſe in theſe words, 'Let him that has an 'ability and is deſirous of hearing:' And moſt certain it is, that to hear is freely to open the ear. A willing heart is eſſential to the hearing of the Spirit. The people of Chriſt are a willing people, and their will, being ſanctified, is much concerned in hearkening to the Lord: they are alſo impartial, and open the ear without any reſerve. This is the language of the obedient ſoul, "Speak, Lord, for thy ſervant heareth." And again, "I will hear what God the Lord will "ſpeak," Pſalm lxxxv. 8. Moreover he is conſtant in this divine exerciſe, it is his habitual and daily practice; and finally, it is that in which he delights. The wiſdom and goodneſs of our adorable Creator are wonderfully

fully diſplayed in ſo conſtituting the human body, that in a healthful and temperate ſtate, the exerciſe of its ſenſes is highly delightful. Thus, in the exerciſe of faith, that ſpiritual ſenſe of the new creature, in whatever manner it is exerted, affords the ſubject a ſingular pleaſure; the very opening of the ear to the Spirit, though it call for great ſelf-denial, is grateful to the chriſtian; his love to Jeſus, and his proſpect of glory to come, yield him unſpeakable joy, even in ſufferings for the ſake of Chriſt and his goſpel.

MANY are the motives which induce the believer to hearken to the Spirit; as for inſtance, his dignity and love. Doſt thou find thyſelf dull, my dear Friend? Conſider who ſpeaks: the infinite majeſty of this divine Perſon, and the grace and power diſplayed in the execution of his office, demand thy regard; it is the voice of God, of the Holy Ghoſt, of that Spirit which proceedeth from the Father and the Son; he is the almighty Agent that formed the body, thy Redeemer aſſumed, in which he bore thy ſins away on the tree; by his power alſo that body was raiſed from the grave, and thou thyſelf waſt quickened when dead in treſpaſſes and ſins, and obtained the ear with which thou canſt hear, and on whom all ſaints depend for the reſurrection of their bodies in the laſt and great day. To turn a deaf ear to the Holy Ghoſt; what is it leſs than to affront thoſe divine Perſons by whom he is ſent, and to deſpiſe him as a Spirit of revelation and grace? But, far be the ſinful and fatal preſumption!

AGAIN, another inducement is *what* the Spirit delivers, which is important and glorious. There is nothing ſpoken by the Spirit to the churches that is falſe, impertinent, or trifling; all his ſayings are true, they are holy and wiſe, and moſt nearly concern us; he ſpeaketh great things, things deep and myſterious, which call for the utmoſt attention to diſcern, and the knowledge of which is of an intereſting nature; whatever he ſaith in his word hath a real connexion with the believer's preſent peace, and will have ſome influence into his future happineſs, or promote the honor of God in his eternal felicity; yea, he is alſo a comforter in all that he ſays to his people. There is no awful threatning, or ſelf-denying precept in the whole book of God, but, if rightly underſtood and duly applied, imports ſome conſolation to the believer: "He will ſpeak peace to his people and unto his "ſaints."

IT is alſo an argument with him that fears God to hear the Spirit, when he conſiders *unto whom* his words are directed, even to himſelf. The voice of the Spirit, particularly in his exhortations to perſeverance, and promiſes of ſalvation, victory, and glory to the churches, is to every diſciple of Jeſus. "He that hath "an ear." If thou haſt an ear, the Holy Ghoſt ſpeaks unto thee; and this is the argument of wiſdom, "Unto you, O man, I call, and my voice is to the "ſons of men," Prov. viii. 4. And beſides, we are to remember that the Lord ſpeaks in kindneſs and love,

Heb.

Heb. xii. 5. ſaith the apoſtle, "Ye have forgotten," i. e. neglected, "and not hearkened to the exhortation "which ſpeaketh unto you as unto children."

AND further, the *importance* of obeying the Spirit, is not the leaſt motive to hearing his voice. In the inſtance before us, we ſee, from the epiſtle itſelf, how awful the expectation of thoſe who would not hear, hold faſt, and repent! On the other hand, the glory and joy of him that attended this divine meſſage is great beyond all expreſſion. In like manner it is in reſpect of the whole of ſacred ſcripture: The divine author is the Spirit of Chriſt, that great Prophet, concerning whom, thus ſaith Jehovah, "Whoſoever ſhall "not hearken to my words, which he ſhall ſpeak in "my name, I will require it of him," Deut. xviii. 19. i. e. puniſh him with everlaſting deſtruction, as appears from Peter's diſcourſe, Acts iii. 23.

THE amount is as follows: The ear demanded in this exhortation, is a ſingular faculty, peculiar to the the regenerate; it is the ear of faith, which is a kind of ſpiritual ſenſe, by which the ſubject is able, through divine aſſiſtance, to diſcern the things of the Spirit, and is duly affected with their importance and glory. The attention required is no other than the exertion of this ability in ſearching into the mind of God, that he may be conformed unto it in heart and life. The motives to which are, the majeſty and grace of the divine Speaker, the excellent and intereſting nature of the things he declares, his direction to the ſubject, and the infinite importance of obeying his voice.

It appears then, that a new heart is needful to a ſaving improvement of the goſpel. A man muſt have an ear before he can hear. Without a faculty ſuited to the object, it is impoſſible to diſcern and embrace it. But of this the natural man is deſtitute, in reſpect of ſpiritual things, he muſt therefore be born again, for, conceived in ſin, his heart is corrupt and totally alienated from God, ſo that he neither doth nor can delight in his law. In vain are the moſt ſtriking repreſentations of divine objects from the word, to the carnal mind; it is void of ſpiritual ſenſe, and the conceit is abſurd, that any ſpiritual object, how glorious ſoever in itſelf, or however juſtly or nearly preſented, or indeed finely illuſtrated, ſhould properly affect it. Hence the moſt ſkilful and affectionate preaching is frequently abortive, and the grace of God is faithfully preached to many in vain; for until the Holy Ghoſt is given from on high, and a new ſpirit is put within the hearer, as promiſed, he cannot diſcern or reliſh the things of God, ſo then "Paul may plant and Apollos water, but God "muſt give the increaſe."

I have already hinted, and it ſhould be remembered, that the chriſtian himſelf ſtands in need of frequent and earneſt exhortations to hearken to the Spirit. No man can hear in any ſenſe without an ear, but he that is endowed with this faculty may be dull of hearing, yea, and ſcarce hear at all to any advantage. Permit me, my Friend, to excite thee: Open thine ear to this divine voice; let this be thy care when in private or in public devotion, yea and in every ſituation and concern

of

of life. Alas, our ears, how often are they turned aſide to vain imaginations! The ſuggeſtions of ſatan and the fancies of men captivate, impoveriſh, and darken our minds, and betray us into ſin; but, if our ears hung on the lips of the Spirit, with what reverence, delight and profit ſhould we hear!

And wouldeſt thou examine thyſelf, my dear Réader; the following criterions may aſſiſt thee. This hearing by faith is accompanied with the love of the Spirit, and his voice; his mouth is moſt ſweet; and no wonder, ſeeing it is the voice of thy Beloved who ſpeaks by him; thou art alſo imploring his divine aids, that thine ear being opened may be perfect and ſound; likewiſe the preaching and the miniſters of the word are highly eſteemed; thou wilt not, as ſome, under a conceit of hearing the Spirit, deſpiſe the means, an attendance on which he hath preſcribed to his ſaints; moreover, the hearers of the Spirit, are thy choſen companions, and every notion or invention of man, contrary to the teſtimony of God, thy utter averſion. And further, thou wilt try whatever is propoſed in the name of the Lord by the ſcriptures, and adhere to nothing in reſpect of doctrine, worſhip or experience, but what they declare to belong to the faithful. And are theſe ſymptoms upon thee, my Friend? then, be not afraid; whatever may be thy infirmities or involuntary defects, thou mayeſt ſoberly rank thyſelf with thoſe who have obtained mercy to incline their ear to the Spirit of holineſs and grace.

To conclude. This ſolemn demand from the exalted Redeemer, proves religion a perſonal thing, and that liberty of conſcience is every man's privilege and duty. Nothing can more effectually cut off every pretence of authority over another man's conſcience than this exhortation; we are not allowed to hearken to any who would arrogate to themſelves a power of impoſing upon us their ſenſe of ſcripture, or preſume to direct our faith, or the manner of our worſhip. He that hath an ear, which is requiſite to vital godlineſs, and which, as we have ſeen, is the ſpecial gift of divine grace, is called upon, not to hear what the *churches* dictate, but what *the Spirit ſaith* unto the churches. No man therefore, nor any body of men, however ſacred in their character, are at any time to be regarded, in point of religion, farther than they agree with the voice of the Holy Ghoſt. Conſcience is ſacred to the authority of God; yea, and by this demand of the Lord every man is not barely *permitted*, but even *commanded* to hear with his *own* ear; he therefore that interpoſes his authority between my ear and the voice of the Spirit, acts a tyrannical and impious part, for every man by this word of the Lord is not only *entitled*, but alſo *obliged* to maintain the rights of his own conſcience, as he will anſwer it to the Almighty. Thus liberty of private judgment, that firſt and great principle of Proteſtants, and of all true religion, is fixed on a ſolid baſis, and never to be ſhaken to the end of the world. Thanks be to God, and our excellent prince and conſtitution,

in

in theſe happy nations, we enjoy this freedom in its utmoſt extent; no point of faith, mode of worſhip, or whatever relates to that dear thing *religion*, is attempted to be impoſed upon us. O that we may lead peaceable lives in all godlineſs and honeſty, and that our ſenſuality, lukewarmneſs, unbelief, and carnal contentions, may never deprive us of the invaluable privilege, or prevent our improving the ſame, to the glory of God, and our own everlaſting advantage!

End of the Epiſtle to the Church at Sardis.

A DISSERTATION ON THE CONDUCT OF THE FAITHFUL IN THE DAYS OF MALACHI.

BOOK VI.

LECTURE XXVII.

The degenerate ſtate of the Jews. What is implied in the ſaints ſpeaking often one to another; topics of diſcourſe. Reflections.

IT appears from the letter which we have opened and read, that a few remained upright amidſt the threatning declenſions at Sardis. Thus in times of the greateſt defection God hath reſerved a people for himſelf; and it may be uſeful to ſee the meaſures they took, that, following their laudable example, we may in like manner preſerve ourſelves in an hour of temptation. No doubt theſe worthy perſons, who ſtand commended of the LORD, were active in their duty; and, while they mourned the ſad ſtate of Zion, uſed every means in their power to maintain their integrity and hope; of this indeed we have no particulars, but, from other like inſtances on record, we may gather the inclination

clination and practice of the ſaints in a time of diſorder, of which none is more directly to our purpoſe than that of thoſe in the days of Malachi, when religion and manners were ſunk to a degree, perhaps below the mark of any former period of the church, I have therefore choſe to ſubjoin a view of their conduct and the memorial taken of their zeal in the preſence of the LORD. It is written in the third chapter of the propheſy, the 16th and 17th verſes, as follows: "Then they "that feared the LORD ſpake often one to another, and "the LORD hearkned and heard it; and a book of re- "membrance was written before him for them that "feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. "And they ſhall be mine, ſaith the LORD of hoſts, in "that day when I make up my jewels; and I will "ſpare them as a man ſpareth his own ſon that ſerv- "eth him." In this account we have the cuſtom of the faithful, the regard which the LORD paid to them, and his gracious reſolution in their favor; the firſt of theſe is the ſubject of this lecture.

THE imagination of ſome, that Malachi was an angel in the form of a man, ſeems whimſical and groundleſs; his name, though it ſignifies an angel, will not ſupport their conjecture, for the ſame word is applied to the Meſſiah himſelf, chap. iii. 1. where the Father ſtiles him *my meſſenger*; ſo that we may as ſoon queſtion the proper humanity of Chriſt, as of this ſervant of the LORD. We are told, 2 Pet. i. 21. that the prophets, with whom Malachi is numbered, Matt. xi. 10. were holy *men*, who ſpake as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt. Some take him to be the ſame with Ezra the

ſcribe,

ſcribe, who indeed was a preacher, and expounded the law to the people, but hath no criterion of a prophet in his character; it is thought, with more colour of reaſon, that he was cotemporary with Nehemiah; this, however, ſeems plain, and is generally allowed, that he was the laſt inſpired meſſenger to ungrateful backſliding Iſrael, and that from his death prophecy ceaſed till the incarnation of the Son of God, being about the ſpace of four hundred years, whoſe appearance was the more conſpicuous for this long night of darkneſs and ſilence.

But our concern is rather with the moral and religious ſtate of the Jews in his day, and, as hinted already, this was ſhamefully diſſolute. Far be it that ſuch a deluge of iniquity ſhould again ſpread over any people or nation! They indulged to all manner of evil, and were ſunk into the very dregs of corruption and wickedneſs. In ver. 5. they are charged with ſorcery, adultery, falſe-ſwearing, oppreſſion, injuſtice, and cruelty. It likewiſe appears that the moſt daring infidelity raged, inſomuch that they impudently ſaid: "Every "one that doth evil is good in the ſight of the Lord, "and he delighteth in them," which is in ſome reſpects worſe than atheiſm itſelf; and, taunting the prophets who threatned them with vengeance, they ſaid, "Where is the God of judgment?" chap. ii. 17. No wonder theſe ſcoffers ſhould profane the holineſs of the Lord, and marry the daughter of a ſtrange God, yet they called themſelves the children of God, and pretended to ſerve the moſt High; but at the ſame time were partial, hypocritical and preſumptuous; like ſome nigardly

nigardly chriſtians whoſe pitiful offering fall ſhort of their ability as required, they deceitfully covered the altar with tears, while they polluted it with their torn and lame ſacrifices, and feaſted themſelves with the lambs of the flock, having plenty of males to anſwer the appointments of the law; but the table of the LORD was contemptible, it was a wearineſs to ſerve him, and they ſcornfully ſnuffed at the proviſion of his houſe; yea, the prieſts themſelves were ignorant, ſlothful, mercenary, and deſpiſed the name of the LORD, for which they were rendered baſe in the eyes of the people, a curſe which ſeems entailed on time-ſerving and corrupt miniſters in every age; for mankind in general, however void of religion themſelves, ſeldom fail of heartily deſpiſing wicked men under a ſacred character; in ſhort, the vileneſs of every rank in this depraved generation is ſcarce to be parallelled, and almoſt incredible; and though they were ſharply reproved they received not correction, but, inſtead of repenting, were ſtout, and with inſolence replied to the LORD: "Wherein have "we robbed thee? wherein have we deſpiſed thy "Name?" And, to conclude this melancholy ſubject, ſo wretched was the time that the more proud and wicked any man was the more he was careſſed and applauded; ſuch was the hateful and deplorable condition of Iſrael when Malachi was ſent in the name of the LORD, and accordingly as a thick ſpreading cloud clothes the heavens with blackneſs, and as it were makes ſackcloth their covering; ſo high and heavy charges on theſe heinous tranſgreſſors, and fearful threatnings of divine vengeance, extend through all this prophecy, inſomuch that ſhort of the account before

fore us, ſo dark is the ſcene, that one might be tempted to think with Elijah, that not a ſaint was left, as if the LORD had totally forſaken his people; but on a ſudden darts forth from this threatning cloud a ray from the Sun of Righteouſneſs to chear us; a remnant appears "that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his "Name!"

BUT what could theſe pious ſouls do? Their number was ſmall, and it is probable alſo their outward condition comparatively mean, for it is ſeldom that others eſcape the pollutions of the day; and, from the ſacrilege and profaneneſs complained of, with what is declared in this prophecy concerning men of that order, it ſeems no breach of charity to ſuppoſe that not a prieſt was to be found in this little company, at leaſt no one of dignity or power was among them; what then was a few, poor and deſpiſed, though godly perſons, capable of, in oppoſition to theſe floods of impiety and vice? Could they ſtem the rapid tide of corruption, or be likely to reform this abandoned race? Or to what purpoſe was it for them to open their lips to this ſcornful and hardened generation? In ſuch evil times the righteous are ſilent, they have no ſafe or promiſing opportunity of ſpeaking to the public in behalf of God and religion, yea, it may be, watch the door of their mouth againſt boſom friends and relations, Mic. vii. 5. What then could be done? muſt each, like a ſolitary dove, tabring on his breaſt, bewail himſelf alone? It is likely they mourned much apart, being greatly perplexed, though not in deſpair; they could find no ſatisfaction or relief in popular aſſemblies, but one way

was

was left among themſelves, and though it was attended with trouble and danger, this way they took, a path little trod in a day of licentiouſneſs and carnal ſecurity. This track is no other than religious conference; they frequently diſcourſed together in uprightneſs and love: "Then," when immorality, profaneneſs and infidelity ſo much abounded, "they that feared the LORD, ſpake "often one to another." And their voice, as we ſhall preſently ſee, came into the ears of the LORD of hoſts with acceptance. In like manner they who love God, without riches, power, learning, or any other ſhining gift of nature or providence, by their holy converſe, in his preſence may greatly edify one another; an expedient more eſpecially uſeful in a ſeaſon of general departure from the ordinances of the LORD, and the habit of life which becomes thoſe who fear him. This was the cuſtom of theſe pious Iſraelites, however inferior they might be in many reſpects, with hearts full of concern for the glory of God, and a view to their own preſervation and comfort, they were enabled by grace to confer together, to their unſpeakable honor and advantage, as will hereafter be ſeen.

Now this practice ſuppoſes, 1. That they had *frequent aſſemblies*. It was impoſſible to hold theſe conferences without meeting together, to which they who fear God have been always inclined, and particularly when they perceived any remarkable danger. Man is ſocial in every ſtate. "The companies of the wicked (ſays "David) have robbed me; but I have not forgotten "thy law," Pſalm cxix. 61. When the impious meet daily to countenance one another in their abominations, and

and to uphold the wretched cauſe of infidelity, ſhall the righteous, whom they hate and oppoſe, forſake the aſſembling of themſelves together, and loſe the things they have gained? John ii. 8. They certainly will not; the ſaints, in the exerciſe of grace, will aſſociate for their mutual ſupport, and in defence of the truth, when the enemy comes in like a flood; and he that can allow himſelf to neglect this natural and neceſſary means of his own preſervation, and of promoting the cauſe of piety in the world, does well to conſider how the love of God dwells in his heart!

AGAIN, it implies that they *freely opened their minds to each other*. The ſcripture is unacquainted with ſilent meetings, which are really vain and abſurd. Religious aſſemblies are for the glory of God and our mutual profit; but, can theſe ends be anſwered where nothing is ſaid? How can our united ſupplications and praiſes aſcend to the Father, or inſtruction and comfort be conveyed to our hearts, in a meeting where a word is not uttered? It is therefore highly unreaſonable to plead for or practice a total ſilence among the ſaints, when gathered together in the name of the LORD. The faithful referred to were otherwiſe taught; they opened their mouths, no doubt, to the LORD, in prayer and thankſgiving; but the report we are now conſidering is confined to their ſpeeches one to another, which might be according to their ability from the word; but here is not ſo much a regard to the preaching of one qualified and called to that important ſervice, which may be one means of eſtabliſhing the children of God in their private aſſemblies; it refers to conference-meetings,

meetings, in which they more freely and univerſally diſcourſed, every one bearing his part; for in converſation, like a bank, each companion has or ſhould have his ſhare; at theſe meetings of the faithful all in general ſpeak in their order, in a manner ſuited to the occaſion and circumſtances they were in, as the expreſſion implies.

THIS leads to obſerve, that we are not to imagine that this was a light or common diſcourſe. The word דבר rendered *ſpake* in the account, is very emphatical; it points to the order of their conferr ng together, and the propriety of what they delivered. The term is applied to God when he ſpake to Moſes, and it is alſo uſed to expreſs the e oquence of Aaron, whoſe lips were prepared to ſpeak well, or in an excellent manner; it is not barely to ſay, but it ſignifies an orderly continued wiſe ſpeech, ſuch as may delight and profit the hearer, and ſhews that theſe pious ſouls were greatly aſſiſted in this humble attempt, and endowed with a Spirit from on high; the confuſed and rude way of ſome, under a pretence of freedom in their aſſemblies, is carnal, indecent and vain, and no more to be compared with the conference commended in ſcripture, than the babling of fools with the ſerious and pertinent diſcourſes of the learned and wiſe, in the moſt reſpectable ſociety. Theſe holy men met under a deep concern for the name of the LORD, and their mutual ſafety and encouragement in his ways, which were deſpiſed; and when the people of God come together in this frame and view, whether in a formal or more familiar manner, the Spirit is often poured out from on high;

high; hence their lips move ſweetly and wiſely. O the reverence, fervor and propriety with which they who fear the Lord ſometimes ſpeak to one another, under the influence of his grace, which he hears with delight!

It is neither preſumptuous nor vain, but may be uſeful to conjecture the topics or heads of diſcourſe the faithful went upon in theſe meetings. Indeed no man now living was preſent, but, from the nature of the thing, and from univerſal experience under the like circumſtances, we may eaſily apprehend, and even venture to affirm, that the following ſubjects had a place in their conference:

1. "The name of the Lord." This includes his nature, counſels and cauſe, as we ſhall have occaſion to ſhew when we enter on the character of the pious. Theſe Iſraelites ſpake the truth in their heart, and no doubt their diſcourſe turned on that which occupied their thoughts. They ſpake one to another concerning the holineſs, juſtice, power and faithfulneſs of the Lord their God. Every one in his temple ſpeaks of his glory. Diſcourſes on the name of the Lord in this ſenſe are very ſtrengthening to the faith of God's people, and tends to engage their hearts towards him. Beſides, we may ſuppoſe that they conferred on the prophecies, hiſtory and promiſes contained in revelation. Indeed, before the invention of printing, copies of the ſcripture were ſcarce; Bibles are now very cheap; but in thoſe days a few leaves of that ſacred volume would fetch a conſiderable ſum; nevertheleſs ſome of the company might furniſh

furniſh the reſt, and others from their memories aſſiſt the aſſembly; hence they might ſpeak to one another on the promiſes of the Meſſiah, God's covenant with Abraham, and his repeated engagements to ſave them that fear him; they might likewiſe diſcourſe on the ſeaſonable and wonderful appearance of the Almighty for the preſervation of his church, and the reviving his cauſe when in danger, by Noah, Moſes, and alſo in the days of Elias, when faith ſeemed to fail, and true religion was ready to expire. Theſe conſiderations, with the immutability of the divine counſel, which inſures the completion of the elect, afford ſtrong conſolation to the faithful, and fill them with courage under the darkeſt ſcenes of providence.

2. THEIR hearts were full of concern about the abominations by which the Name of the LORD was blaſphemed, and therefore no doubt they dwelt upon the threatning errors and diſorders which prevailed. In this ſad ſtate of things, as hinted before, they might be rather diſcouraged from ſpeaking to others who, being hardened in their iniquity, would only deride and abuſe them, and thereby add to their guilt; but to one another, in thoſe conference-meetings they freely unburthened their minds on the melancholy ſubject, which might be uſeful to excite a becoming indignation againſt the provoking tranſgreſſions of the times, to keep them on their guard, and to animate them in holding faſt their profeſſion. And further,

3. IT may be preſumed that they ſpake to one another concerning the ſnares that were about them, and

the temptations they were under, at leaſt in ſome meaſure, to comply with the ſinful cuſtom of the day, and thereby to fall from their ſtedfaſtneſs. In a ſeaſon of general defection, men full of ſubtlety lie in wait, if poſſible, to pervert from the ways of the LORD, and there are commonly popular arts in practice, by which ſome are overtaken to their hurt; theſe differ according to the taſte of the times, and are craftily adapted to the temper and circumſtances of the object; but whatever may be the form of the nets which are ſpread, it is natural for thoſe who are on the watch, to acquaint one another with what they perceive, and mention the inſtances in which they prevail, that, being ſufficiently warned, they may eſcape the paths of the deſtroyer. To this it may be needful, at times, to call to remembrance their frailty, and how liable the beſt are, through the deceit of the fleſh, to be overtaken and fall into ſin.

BUT, of all the ſubjects which may turn up in the conference of the ſaints in a time of apoſtaſy, there is none more common or uſeful than that of their own experience. By experience I mean the efficacy of the goſpel in the heart, which is through the operation of the Spirit, and that communion with God and ſenſe of his love, which the believer may have found in his attendance on divine inſtitutions. That the word comes not in word only but alſo in power, ſufficient to inveſt the ſubject with an aſſurance of the truth, and that they who embrace it with love, and obey it from the heart, have enjoyed delightful fellowſh p with the LORD in his ways, muſt be owned by thoſe who pretend to the

the credit of divine revelation; and indeed, he who has felt nothing of this internal effect by the word unto repentance and faith, is a ſtranger to vital religion; for we are expreſly told that the word thus "effectually "worketh in them that believe," 1 Theſſ. ii. 13. It is not barely a fact which has in ſome degree once been found with the chriſtian, much leſs is it confined to thoſe who are ſtrong in faith, this effect is common to them who believe; nor were the faithful of old without this experience, the ſymptoms of which are, hatred of ſin, deſires after holineſs, and joy in the LORD; now, however ſome under a ſpecious pretence of humility, and the deceit of the heart, would take chriſtians off from a regard to this as an uncertain and tranſitory thing, if any ſuch experience exiſts, to heſitate which is to favor of deiſm itſelf, let reaſon judge if a remembrance thereof is not a natural and powerful means to eſtabliſh its ſubject in an age that is looſe and prophane, for this man has the witneſs in himſelf to the truth from which he is tempted to depart; he has felt the power of thoſe doctrines, which the wicked contradict and blaſpheme; and can a man be eaſily moved from the truth which hath been effectual to his growth in grace, and communion with God? He that doth the truth cometh to the light, and will bring the feelings of his heart, as well as his external obedience, to the ſtandard of ſcripture, for he is concerned to manifeſt its ſobriety, and that it is agreeable to the analogy of faith, and to the common teſtimony of the ſaints, for even experimental religion is ſubſtantially the ſame in the called, and nothing can be more rational than to improve that experience, the reality of which is evident

to his conſcience, into an argument for holding faſt his profeſſion, for though no man's private experience is a proof to another that his religion is divine, yet to himſelf a more ſolid evidence of this he cannot poſſeſs, miraculous teſtimony or immediate inſpiration alone excepted; even that beſt of internal evidence which belongs to the Bible, namely, the purity of its doctrines and precepts, is not equal to that of its ſanctifying effects in the heart, of which the believer is conſcious on reflection. This being the caſe, it is eaſy to ſee the advantage that muſt ariſe to the faithful by a free communication of their experience to each other, to confirm them and to animate their perſeverance amidſt the ſcorn of unbelievers, or licentious profeſſors, for, what man who hath this evidence of the truth in his heart will deſpiſe or forſake it? The apoſtle was animated by this effect of the word upon others: "For I am not "aſhamed of the goſpel of Chriſt, for it is the power "of God to the ſalvation of every one that believeth," Rom. i. 16. How much more ſhall a man be encouraged to abide in his profeſſion, who finds himſelf the ſubject of this divine power? May the Reader manifeſt his knowledge of the like teſtimony by his walk, for I preſume that he is convinced that no article or topic of diſcourſe is more profitable among the children of God, in a perilous time, than what relates to their acquaintance with experimental religion. Other particulars might be ſubjoined, namely, their infinite obligations to Jeſus, who was ſacrificed for them, the contradictions he endured, and the ſhame he deſpiſed when he ſuffered on the croſs; they will likewiſe remember their ſolemn engagements to him and his people, the miſe-

rable

rable end of apoſtates, and by every argument in their power excite one another to ſtrive againſt ſin and to hold out to the end; and, to ſay no more, they will not forget the grace there is in Chriſt to ſupport and deliver them, nor the glory they ſhall obtain at his appearance and kingdom; but time would fail, and the Reader will think theſe hints are ſufficient.

It appears then, that chriſtians are not ſilent when together, for want of ſubjects adapted to their comfort in this ſtate of trial. The things of the Spirit afford a rich variety of matter for diſcourſe; yet, alas, how often is it ſeen that, being ſtraitened in themſelves, they are dumb, or rarely converſe on what relates to the kingdom of God; but when they are enabled to open their boſom and ſpeak freely on theſe divine topics, they find comfort by the mutual faith of each other; it knits them together in love, and has a powerful tendency to revive their ſpirits when drooping, inſomuch that ſometimes they meet in heavineſs through manifold temptations, and return with thankſgiving and joy, being ready as it were to take off their harps from the willows, and with melody tune them to the God of their life, ſo that they who omit ſuch opportunities little think how much they loſe by their abſence, and lie out of the way of their own great advantage.

From this inſtance of piety it alſo appears that true religion is ſocial. Indeed the godly man is obliged to ſhun the vain multitude. He is in a manner ſequeſtered from the world, and muſt often retire, it may be ſome-

times from the beſt of company, for, however ſome live, private devotion is needful to a cloſe walk with God; to be unacquainted with this, is to be a ſtranger to faith, or at leaſt ſuch are declining apace from its virtue, and will one day bitterly weep for their folly; now, on account of theſe neceſſary withdrawments, the believer may be thought an unſociable creature, but this is for want of underſtanding or conſidering the nature and tendency of his life, which, while it induces him into his chamber to converſe with himſelf and his LORD, that the life of religion may be maintained in his ſoul, by that very means preſerves an habitual ſenſe of the love of God to him, and his approaching ſalvation, which naturally create a deſire, yea, and ſometimes a longing after thoſe aſſemblies in which he may hope for a taſte of that joy, in the fulneſs of which the ſpirits of the juſt ſing round the throne of God and the Lamb. Thus the believer's cloſet fits him for the ſanctuary, and his private intercourſe with heaven prepares and diſpoſes him for the communion of ſaints; nor is any effect of divine love in the heart more certain, than that of a readineſs to meet them on every proper occaſion, and a delight in their preſence. Some under a high profeſſion of the goſpel may be cynical and reſerved, but it is unjuſt to charge their diſagreeable temper on the religion of Jeſus, the genius of which is quite the reverſe; nothing can be more directly oppoſite to an evangelical ſpirit, to which brotherly love is eſſential, than any thing that ſavours of a monkiſh life, which ſome men, through weakneſs or deſign, plead for and practice. The goſpel leads its ſubjects to aſſociate often, and to an open frank converſation

verſation one with another; ſo that it is no good ſign, and far from being amiable, when perſons affect the unſociable habit which ſome men wear; a habit which as it is contrary to ſcripture-example, is no leſs prejudicial to the intereſt of religion, for it tends to deprive the faithful of one principal means of their confirmation and joy.

It is an obſervation grounded on univerſal experience, that a man is known by his company. Thus the friends of the believer are thoſe who fear God; his natural or civil connexions in life may expoſe him to very unpleaſing ſociety at times, but he that walks in the Spirit will not chooſe to aſſociate with the ignorant and prophane; he is, with David, "a companion of all "them that fear God;" and he delights in the ſaints who are the excellent of the earth; hence he is earneſt with the LORD in ſuch language as this: "Let thoſe "that fear thee turn unto me, and thoſe that have "known thy teſtimonies." Art thou, Reader, a companion of the ungodly, thou art either ungodly thyſelf, or ſtrangely ſeduced; beware of the plagues that are coming on the wicked, but I would hope thy fellowſhip is with the righteous; be thankful for thy happy ſituation; it is a ſingular advantage to enjoy their favor and company, but a mercy ſtill greater is an heart to improve it.

AND, are the advantages of chriſtian conferences ſo great and important? may we not juſtly lament that it is ſo much neglected, or rather laid aſide? That there is now little of it in the ordinary diſcourſe of believers,

almoſt every one knows, a ſorrowful ſymptom of their hearts being too ſeldom employed on heavenly ſubjects; hence many are lean and unfruitful, but, as the perfection of chriſtian ſociety lies in a goſpel church ſtate, the intereſt of religion is moſt effectually promoted by the gatherings of thoſe who are joined in the LORD, it is therefore melancholy indeed, when members of the ſame church either ſpeak not at all, or rarely ſay any thing to one another about the things of God. Caſual and ordinary meetings of the faithful ought to be improved to their ſpiritual profit, but the principal and only ſufficient means of promoting the kingdom of God, is the fellowſhip of the ſaints in the order of the goſpel, to which every other pious endeavour muſt be ſubordinate; hence the old ſerpent, in every age, would entice men from a regard to this divine inſtitution; in ſome inſtances, they who belong to this or the other community, omit the aſſemblies of their brethren, and ſeem to be religious abroad, which is ſtrange; but, from what we have ſeen, the advantage of conferring together is manifeſtly great, it ſhould therefore be encouraged in every church, without which one conſiderable end of communion and means of keeping up the power of godlineſs is loſt. O that theſe ancient worthies were followed! can any thing be more highly approved than their practice? or can it with reaſon be doubted whether their conduct is tranſmitted for the imitation of poſterity? Why then, Beloved, is the laudable cuſtom diſcouraged or forſaken? Things are not ſo bad with us as in the time of thoſe whoſe example is before us; but, are there no appearances to awaken our concern for the Name of the LORD, and to put

us on every method to quicken one another in his way? why then do we omit this excellent means of promoting the knowledge and love of God? will you ſay that religious conferences have been abuſed? Be it ſo; what means of grace may not be abuſed by vain and ſelf-confident perſons? Shall the children of God be ſilent, or refrain from ſpeaking one to another, becauſe ſome baſe hypocritical men have taken occaſion from theſe exerciſes to intrude and exalt themſelves, againſt the order and peace of the church? This method of edification is ſo natural, that it is ſcarce to be avoided by them who are earneſtly ſeeking the things which are above, inſomuch that whenever the work of the LORD is going forward, conference-meetings abound, and the enlightened gladly lay hold of every opportunity for ſpeaking on divine ſubjects, and the conſtant uſe of this practice in a church is of great ſervice towards the mutual acquaintance and love of the members, diſcerning of gifts for the miniſtry, preventing apoſtaſies, and promoting the power of godlineſs among them. O that the faithful were enlarged, and their lips circumciſed to ſpeak to one another, that they were free to communicate their experience and knowledge, and to lay open the temptations, fears, hope and joy, which exerciſe their hearts in a life of faith; nothing can be more rational or becoming their character. By this means many a church has been preſerved, or revived, yea, and in ſome inſtances long ſuſtained without a ſtated miniſter, till one has been obtained, with a bleſſing, under whom it hath flouriſhed again; it is therefore to be wiſhed that the example before us was univerſally followed, and ſpiritual

confe-

conference encouraged in every chriſtian community. A practice ſo highly pleaſing to the LORD, and conducive to the intereſt of perſonal and ſocial religion, muſt ſurely be the object of their deſire, who hope to be his in the day when he makes up his jewels, which will abundantly recompence the ſelf-denial that may attend their zeal for his Name.

LECTURE XXVIII.

What included in thinking on the Name of the LORD. His hearkening to his peoples diſcourſe, and book of remembrance, explained. Reflections.

WE have ſeen the righteous in conference together at a time when the Name of the LORD was profaned, and have heard, as it were, the ſubjects on which they diſcourſed. Theſe exerciſes are eſteemed, in proportion to the increaſe or decay of vital godlineſs, inſomuch that we may in a meaſure diſcover the ſtate of religion among any body of people, by their regard to ſuch pious and needful aſſemblies. When the work of the LORD is going forward, the affections of his ſaints are raiſed towards heaven, then they delight in thoſe interviews before him which tend to promote his intereſt, and their mutual advantage. At firſt converſion men naturally deſire to tell what God hath done for their ſouls, and to be further enlightened, and it is the joy of more advanced believers, when in a becoming frame, to aſſiſt their young brethren. Hence they

they gladly embrace every fit opportunity of coming together. To this ſome object and ſay, that theſe meetings interfere with the chriſtian's obligations in other reſpects; but, however ſome idle perſons may have neglected their duty, and given juſt cauſe of complaint, it is far from being impoſſible for the diſciples of Jeſus, who are nearly ſituated, to hold *frequent*, I had almoſt ſaid, *daily* * aſſemblies for ſpiritual exerciſe; this

* As hinted p. 288, if people delighted in ſpiritual exerciſes, they might contrive frequent meetings without a neglect of their civil concerns. The daily prayers, and other religious ſervice in the Eſtabliſhed Church, and alſo among the Diſſenters, in almoſt every market-town and city in the kingdom, not excepting the metropolis itſelf, evidently prove that our forefathers found this to be fact, otherwiſe, what ſhould be the occaſion or motive to the many donations and voluntary ſubſcriptions for the ſupport of ſuch opportunities? We may flatter ourſelves; but, for the moſt part, abſence from theſe appointments is not owing to neceſſary buſineſs, but to a want of inclination, and the truth is, that we are too plainly now become lovers of pleaſure more than lovers of God. I take leave further to obſerve concerning theſe occaſional meetings of the faithful, that, however in the general they were promiſcuous from the beginning, there are inſtances recorded in which they were compoſed of women only, who exerciſed, at leaſt in prayer, one among another; in all appearance this was the caſe in the houſe of Mary, Acts xii. 12. At this meeting for prayer many were gathered, but not a man ſeen among them; and from what Peter ſays, ver. 17. it ſhould ſeem that neither James, nor any of the brethren were there; but, that in which Lydia was converted, an account of which we have in chap. xvi. is ſtill more to the purpoſe. We are told that Paul ſpake to the women which reſorted thither; and will any perſon ſuppoſe that the men withdrew on the entrance of the apoſtle, or that he ſpake not to all who were preſent? To ſay that the greater part were women, or that Paul diſcourſed with theſe women before worſhip began, is at beſt an improbable conjecture, and as it were begging the queſtion; no circumſtance is mentioned that would induce an unprejudiced perſon to conclude that a man, beſides the apoſtle and his companions, came to this meeting: And, why ſhould not women endowed with grace exerciſe one among another in private? Indeed their ſilence is required in open and public aſſemblies, it being, as declared

this may certainly be done without any impeachment of their character in civil and natural life, and it has always been the caſe in a flouriſhing ſtate of the church. Widely different from this, was the period in which the faithful referred to were accuſtomed to meet; there was then not a bare coldneſs or neglect, but an averſion to the ways of the LORD, which is ever attended with a popular contempt of thoſe who delight in waiting upon him. Under theſe circumſtances we may ſuppoſe that their meetings were private, or that they who followed them were expoſed to reproach and deriſion; but the God whom they ſerved diſdained not to own them, whoſe record on high in their favor, infinitely overbalanced the diſgrace and trial they met with from men,

clared in 1 Cor. xiv. 35. a ſhame for women to ſpeak in the church; nor ſhould any preſume to encourage a practice in direct oppoſition to the teſtimony of God; but, if it is abſolutely unlawful for a woman to pray, or to open her mouth on points of religion, in any aſſembly whatever, where is the pertinency or deſign of the apoſtle's diſcourſe in chap. xi. 5, 6? Several other paſſages ſhew that women were employed in a ſpiritual way for the benefit of the diſciples, namely, Acts xviii. 27. Rom. xvi. 1. Phil. iv. 3. Rev. ii. 20, &c. which the Reader may conſult at his leiſure. Indeed it ſeems unreaſonable to reſtrain chriſtian women from any manner of of edifying one another, in their power, that is decent, and that conſiſts with the order of the church, preſcribed by the LORD, and his inſpired miniſters. In one word, I ſee nothing in nature or ſcripture that forbids a woman the liberty of praying, or otherwiſe exerciſing her ability, in private or ſpecial ſociety, which I the rather mention, becauſe without this allowance, in ſome circumſtances, one means of religion is entirely loſt, particularly family-prayer, and that even where the riſing generation is nearly concerned, and there is reaſon to fear that this groundleſs prejudice againſt a woman's being exerciſed in a ſocial way under any conſideration whatever, hath occaſioned a ſad neglect of that branch of worſhip in ſome, who might otherwiſe have led thoſe under their care to the throne of grace, with advantage, though, to their praiſe be it ſpoken, a few of that ſex are not aſhamed of their duty to God, and the ſouls committed to their charge.

men, which we are now to conſider. "And the LORD "hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance "was written before him for them that feared the "LORD, and that thought upon his Name." To think on the Name of the LORD is a criterion of genuine piety, it may therefore be uſeful to open this critical note, and ſhew unto whom it belongs, and then ſee the attention which Jehovah gave to the godly in their meetings, and the tranſaction which enſued this gracious notice of their zeal for his glory.

THE Name of the LORD, in this place, is his public authority, worſhip and intereſt; or in other words, it is his truth, ordinances, and viſible church, and comprehends every thing that relates to real piety, in its power and form; it is the cauſe of God and truth, and ſtands oppoſed to infidelity, prophaneneſs and vice, of every kind and degree, whereby the moſt High is diſhonored and blaſphemed, as in the corrupt and degenerate age of Malachi: To this agrees chap. i. 11. "My Name, ſaith the LORD of hoſts, ſhall be great "among the Gentiles," i. e. as appears from the ſentence immediately following, "in every place incenſe "ſhall be offered to his Name, and a pure offering," which came to paſs through the obedience of faith, when the goſpel obtained in the world.

Now to think on this Name, is not barely to have a thought about it, which the wicked may have; nor doth it preclude all concern about civil and temporal things, without which no man can fill up his ſtation in providence, or adorn a chriſtian profeſſion; neither is

it

it impoſſible for a man who is entitled to this character, through one occaſion and another, to have the Name of the LORD out of his thoughts for a ſeaſon: His experience was rare, who laments in his diary, that on a certain day, for the ſpace of an hour, he was a ſtranger to a thought of Jeſus and his Name. Alas, how many hours and days paſs away without an affecting ſenſe of his love, and concern for his glory!

THIS regard for the Name of the LORD, lies, 1. In an habitual concern for his honor, and the intereſt of religion, which is inherent to a principle of grace, and inſeparable from the love of God in the ſoul. The new creature breathes after the glory of its divine Author; ſo that it is as natural for the righteous to think on the Name of the LORD, as the thought of fooliſhneſs is to the wicked. This ſacred habit in the faithful appears to be univerſal from Iſa. xxvi. 8. "The deſire of our "ſoul is to thy Name and remembrance of thee." Herein lies a critical difference between the natural and ſpiritual man's thoughts of God, that in one it is forced, diſagreeable, againſt the prevailing bent of his mind, and what he would gladly diſmiſs; whereas in the other it is of choice, accompanied with delight, and what he ſeeks after, as David, "My meditation on him "ſhall be ſweet," Pſalm civ. 34. Which leads, 2. To obſerve, that the firſt ſenſible and actual exerciſe of this divine habit is a fixed and deep intention of mind, contemplating the intereſt and glory of God: The word imports a cloſe inſpection, as the ingenious artificer turns about a curious work, and views it on every ſide, that he may finiſh the ſame: So that one obvious and

eſſential

eſſential idea, is that of employing our faculties in ruminating on the Name of the LORD. He therefore who is a ſtranger to the ſtudy of thoſe things which belong to the kingdom of God, has no pretence to this character; nor is it merely to meditate, but, 3. To think, with a ſolicitude of mind, about its proſperity, with contrivance how to promote it. This thoughtfulneſs turns not only on the excellency and importance of the Name of Jehovah, but alſo on the danger it is in through the declenſions and apoſtacies of the times, and implies our chief care and ſtudy to ſave, revive, and increaſe it. The word is ſometimes rendered *deviſe:* and he that doth not lay to heart the welfare of Zion, and contrive what in him lies towards the intereſt of Chriſt in his day, falls ſhort of the deſcription. In a word, it imports doing to our utmoſt, whatever may tend to the honor of God, or exerting our talents of every kind for his glory. Some obſerve from this clauſe, that here is comfort for the poor and weak, who can ſcarce ſay or do any thing for promoting the cauſe of the Redeemer in the world; the promiſe is not to them who *do*, but to thoſe who *think* on the Name of the LORD; but every one who anſwers this character will be active according to his ability. In vain do they pretend to a cordial regard for the cauſe of God, who withhold any thing in their power to promote it; and what man is not capable of doing ſomething? who cannot pray for Zion, appear in her aſſemblies, and be more or leſs active for the peace of Jeruſalem?

THUS to think on the Name of the LORD is no ſuperficial tranſitory or fruitleſs thing, but a ſolid, permanent,

nent, and choice experience of the faithful, and carries in it the utmoſt ſolicitude and endeavour of the ſubject for the glory of God. Now whoever is thus employed will find himſelf grieved, or rejoiced, as the intereſt of religion declines or proſpers; he will alſo deny himſelf, when needful, and, if called to it, ſubmit to the loweſt or moſt difficult office of love, for the ſake of Chriſt and his people. Happy the man who hath this noble teſtimony of his conſcience! the LORD will think upon him in a time of trouble, and great is his honor, as will hereafter appear.

AND, hath the Reader a claim in this note of the righteous? Is he conſcious of a like ſolicitude for the Name of the LORD, and concern for his intereſt in the world? Alas, ſome nominal chriſtians openly diſcover a want of this regard for the welfare of Zion; they live in a ſenſual manner, and are not grieved for the apoſtaſies of the times; but awful is the threatening: "If ye will not lay it to heart to give glory unto my "Name, ſaith the LORD of hoſts, I will even ſend a "curſe upon you." O that careleſs backſliders, who neglect the honor of God, could tremble at his word, and repent of their folly! But, my Friend, is, "hal-"lowed be thy Name," engraved in thine heart? haſt thou a cordial concern for the cauſe of religion in a degenerate age? Rejoice; cheriſh every thought which the love of God may excite in thy breaſt for his glory, purſue it with vigour, and ſeize the opportunity for action; it may call for much ſelf-denial; the world may ſcoff, and wanton profeſſors reproach thee, but the

the eye of the LORD is upon thee; dare to be holy, and zealous in his ways; thou ſhalt not loſe thy reward!

DECENT conceptions of Jehovah will prevent low and carnal ideas of this report of his grace; when we ſpeak of the LORD's hearkening to his people, we are to guard againſt every conceit unworthy his glorious perfections, and not indulge a thought to the diſhonor of his infinite mind. Far be it to imagine that the eternal God is at any uncertainty about what is ſpoken in ſecret, or that his acquaintance with what paſſes in the moſt private aſſemblies of his ſaints, depends on that formal attention, by which they attain to the knowledge of one anothers diſcourſe; bodily parts and geſtures are no doubt attributed to God by way of alluſion, and denote a ſimilitude in his diſpenſations with the conduct of men under the like circumſtances; thus his ſupporting grace is deſcribed by holding with his hand, and putting underneath his arm; his regard of the ſtate and ſupplications of his people, by opening his eyes and his ears; and when it is declared that he hearkened and heard what theſe gracious perſons ſaid in their meetings, I apprehend the following ideas are included, 1. That he is *preſent*. They who liſten to diſcourſe are ſuppoſed to be in company, or near, at leaſt within hearing: It is true the Almighty fills heaven and earth, and in this ſenſe is always at hand and not far off, Jer. xxiii. 23, 24. But we know that there is a ſpecial and gracious preſence vouchſafed to them who fear God; he is nigh unto all who call upon him in truth, Pſalm cxlv. 18. Of this there was a ſymbol in Solo-

mon's temple, and the promiſe is given to the ſmalleſt aſſembly of his ſaints, Matt. xviii. 20. And it is frequently found, that when two or three are gathered in his Name, they have reaſon to ſay: Is not the LORD in this place! Again, *ſilence* is another idea connected with hearkening. The LORD is ſaid to keep ſilence when he ſpeaks not in judgment to the wicked, Pſalm l. 3. Alſo Jer. viii. 6. it is ſaid, that he hearkened and heard, but they ſpake not aright, no man repented him of his wickedneſs, i. e. the LORD gave them ſpace for repentance, but they did not improve his long-ſuffering and grace; ſo that this may intend, among other things, the forbearance of the Almighty, who could have looked on the proud and abaſed them, but he ſaw meet, as it were, to ſtand ſtill in the courſe of his providence, and ſuffer the wicked to prevail, which, however a trial to the righteous, gave them an opportunity of teſtifying their zeal for his Name, which turned to their advantage. It alſo implies his *peculiar attention.* Men liſten in order to obſerve what is ſaid; and the LORD hearkening to the converſation of thoſe who think on his Name, eſſentially includes his particular notice of whatever they ſpake; with this ſtands connected an idea of his *perfect knowledge* of all their diſcourſe; the end of hearing is to underſtand the report; indeed among men this end may be loſt; through diſtance, the lowneſs of the ſpeaker, or ſome occaſional obſtruction, a perſon may hearken in vain, but nothing can prevent the all-perfect Jehovah from an exact and full acquaintance with every thing which paſſeth in the conference of his people. Finally, it denotes his *approbation and delight:* "Let me hear thy voice, for ſweet is

"thy

" thy voice," Cant. ii. 14. A melodious ſound engages the attention, and the LORD hearkens to the prayer and pious diſcourſe of his ſaints, in their religious aſſemblies, as one who hath a taſte for muſic inclines his ear to a ſound and good inſtrument, played by a ſkilful hand. Theſe are the natural and principal ideas contained in this wonderful ſentence, namely, the preſence of the LORD in the aſſemblies of his ſaints, his ſilence, his attention, his perfect knowledge of every thing they ſay, and the pleaſure he takes in their concern for his glory: Their earneſt ſupplications, and affectionate ſpeeches one to another, out of love to his Name, aſcend up before him, as pillars of ſmoke, " with myrrh and franckincenſe, perfumed with " all powder of the merchant," Cant. iii. 6. All which is very inciting, and may well induce us to follow this noble example of piety, and eſpecially when we conſider the honorable notice which is taken of theſe eminent ſaints, to which we proceed.

" AND a book of remembrance was written before " him." It has already been ſhewn that there are many kind of books mentioned in ſcripture, to be opened when the judgment is ſet. A book of remembrance is a regiſter of names or events, to which recourſe may be had on proper occaſions. The alluſion is to the cuſtom of princes, who order their ſcribes or ſecretaries to write down certain important events, in their preſence. Thus when the conſpiracy of Bigthen and Tereſh, certified by Eſther in Mordecai's name, was proved, it was written in the book of the Chronicles before the king at court, i. e. in the royal preſence,

which was afterward produced, and his faithful ſervant, who diſcovered the matter, rewarded, chap. vi. 3. In like manner the LORD is here repreſented, ſeeing with his own eyes a true record of what he had heard with his ears from thoſe who feared him, whoſe pious affection, fidelity and courage, he determines to recompence, with a glory not to be fully expreſſed. The eternal omniſcient Jehovah needs no memorial; but this manner of ſpeaking after the uſage of men, denotes his delight in theſe ſaints, his everlaſting remembrance of their love, and the certain reward of his grace, as may be ſeen by comparing the paſſage with Iſa. xlix. 16. and Hoſ. vii. 2. This memorial was written *before him*, i. e. under his eye and inſpection, to be continually in his ſight, or laid up in the archives of heaven, above the reach of any who would eraſe or deſtroy it, that nothing might be loſt, but that every inſtance of their holy zeal might appear in that day, when the righteous ſhall be crowned in his preſence. Conſiderations of a moſt enlivening nature, and admirably adapted to inſpire them with an unſhaken reſolution to the end of their courſe.

THE particulars of the glory aſſigned theſe advocates for God and religion, are at preſent reſerved, but in general we are told, that the record was *for* them. It was not like that which Iſaiah was directed to inſcribe againſt the degenerate children of Iſrael, in which was inſerted their rebellion and ruin; no, this is a regiſter highly in their favor; indeed it contained the names and conference of theſe holy perſons, but the phraſe expreſſes more than its being meerly *of* or *concerning* them,

them, and points at the tenor and deſign of this writing, namely, that it was to their honor, and to ſecure their future and eternal advantage. In a word, this memorial is revealed not for their ſakes only, who lived in Malachi's days, but alſo for the conſolation and joy of them who think upon the Name of the LORD in every place, to the end of the world; and he that believes will hold faſt his integrity, however tried, and reckon that his preſent ſufferings are not worthy to be compared with the dignity and bleſſedneſs of his acceptance with the LORD at his coming.

How much to be admired is the condeſcention and grace of the moſt High! That the infinite and adorable God ſhould thus bow down to his creatures, or hearken to the feeble voice of his imperfect ſaints in their little aſſemblies, is truly aſtoniſhing! May we not juſtly adopt the words of the royal conſecrator, when, on his knees in the temple, and with expanded hands towards heaven, he draws back as it were with holy amazement, and ſay, "But will God in very deed dwell with men on "the earth!" The thrones in heaven bend, to behold this wonderful kindneſs of Jehovah to his people! That the glorious LORD of univerſal creation, who alſo, in his ſtate as Mediator, is far above all principalities and powers, and whoſe ears are continually ſaluted with the adorations and ſongs of the innumerable ſpirits above, ſhould ſtoop, and be taken with the groans and tears, and broken conferences of them that fear him below; this is wonderful indeed, and can only be reſolved into that ſovereign love which paſſeth underſtanding, and which firſt brought him down from his

glory in which he ſhone with the Father, to humble himſelf to the ſhame and death of the croſs, that he might redeem us to God by his blood!

THIS throws a luſtre on the conference of the faithful, and ſhould engage them to be frequently ſpeaking one to another. The preſence and ear of the LORD are a glory on the aſſembly of his people, however ſmall or deſpiſed. The reputation of any ſociety draws many after it; and if men ſought the honor which comes from God only, they would certainly delight in thoſe meetings, which they too often ſhun. It is natural to frequent the aſſemblies we apprehend to our credit and advantage; how ſtrange is it then that a good man can be unſociable in this reſpect, or refuſe to join in an exerciſe ſo rational, ſo approved of the LORD, and ſo beneficial to himſelf, and to the deareſt intereſt he has!

UNDER a perſuaſion of this divine preſence and notice, with what reverence and ſobriety ſhould we behave in our aſſemblies! In a meeting where every thing that paſſes is recorded in heaven, and the LORD is preſent himſelf, who can allow a vain thought or trifling expreſſion? Would a man of ſenſe or modeſty behave unſeemly, or ſay any thing diſagreeable in the preſence or hearing of a wiſe and reſpectable governor or prince? would he not be careful to avoid whatever might offend his highneſs, and ſtudy to honor and pleaſe him? Impertinent and fooliſh diſcourſe among them who profeſs to fear God, on any occaſion, is *low*, and unworthy their character; yet, alas, if this book of remembrance

was

was laid open before us; could we read without bluſhing? How many hours that are ſpent, even in the company of chriſtians, ſtand ready to accuſe us? Our ſpeech ſhould always be good, that it may miniſter grace to the hearers, but in religious meetings, more eſpecially we ſhould keep our hearts with all diligence, and behave in an orderly, decent, humble and cautious manner, as in the ſight of the LORD. A due ſenſe of the record taken in heaven of what is ſaid among the ſaints on earth, would check the boldneſs of ſome, who ſpeak, or rather prate, without thinking, and give juſt offence. Beloved, we are not to be raſh with our mouth, but pray for a ſpirit of wiſdom, that we may know how to conduct ourſelves in the houſe of God, who dwells in the midſt of his people. This holy guard in the aſſemblies of the ſaints is perfectly conſiſtent with a becoming freedom in expreſſing our thoughts and experience, or whatever may tend to the promoting of vital religion.

BUT, thou art ready to object, my talents are mean, I can ſay or do little or nothing for the cauſe; and on that account am tempted to abſent from the meetings of the brethren. Thou haſt the greater need to attend them; they are an excellent means of ſtrengthening the weak, and increaſing the light and capacity of thoſe who fear God, and, where is the uprightneſs of thy complaint, if thou art not ſeeking more grace? It is poſſible that pride may lurk at the bottom of this ſpecious pretence; is it decent to ſay, I will not employ the capacity I have, becauſe it is not equal to that which ſome others obtain? Wilt thou refuſe to acknowledge the ſovereignty

of God in the diſtribution of his gifts? Or, canſt thou, with reaſon, expect to be further entruſted, if thou doſt not improve the talent thou haſt? Be clothed with humility, and do not think thyſelf utterly incapable of ſerving the intereſt of religion. A perſonal appearance among the ſaints, is in itſelf a means of thoſe aſſemblies, in which they contrive and act for the Name of the LORD; and, is not this in thy power? Thou haſt not the eloquence of Aaron or the tongue of Apollos, yea, it may be thou canſt ſcarce ſpeak at all, yet, if with real concern for the honor of God, you aſſiſt with your preſence before him, he knows thy deſires, and his ear is open to the voice of thine heart. It is an honor to be qualified for pleading the cauſe of God, and for edifying his church, but his gracious memorial in behalf of his people is not confined to thoſe who ſpeak beſt, or even to them who *do* moſt, but extends to all who *think* on his Name. Upon the whole, it appears that there is no reaſon to be diſcouraged on account of thy weakneſs, nor is that an excuſe for thy non-attendance with the faithful in their conference-meetings.

AND, what is the contempt, ill-will, or reproaches of men, or any other trials to be met with in thus ſeeking the kingdom of God? The world may deem it weak and ſuperſtitious, and they who are addicted to pleaſure, and attend all aſſemblies but that of the ſaints, may pronounce it affected ſingularity, or even doubt the ſincerity of thoſe who follow them; they will object and lay every ſtumbling-block they can in thy way, if not maliciouſly watch for thy halting, and magnify every failing againſt thee; yea and further,

thou

thou mayeſt be forſaken by ſome who were once thy zealous companions, ſee little ſucceſs, and even for a ſeaſon be in darkneſs of ſoul. Thus the LORD may hide himſelf, and keep ſilence awhile, nevertheleſs thy name is written in heaven; a book of remembrance is there; not a thought, a ſigh, a tear, a word, or an action, ſhall be loſt or forgotten. Then be not aſhamed; though out of the books of ſome men, to thy preſent diſadvantage, and the contempt of vain perſons; thou art noted in this book of God, precious in his ſight, and ſhalt receive at his hands a crown of glory which fadeth not away.

To conclude: Should not the gracious inclination and regard of the LORD to his ſaints when diſcourſing together on his Name, excite their attention to him? It belongs to the faithful to hear whatever the LORD God will ſpeak, and his hearkening to them is one motive to this obedience of faith. "The companions "hearken to thy voice," Cant. viii. 13. It is not only diſobedient but ungrateful to neglect his voice, whoſe ear is attentive to ours. Bluſh, Chriſtian, if thy conſcience tells thee thou haſt at any time diſcovered a want of regard to the authority and love of thy LORD, who is ever waiting to be gracious unto thee! In a word, is a book of remembrance written before him for thee? let a memorial of his free and wonderful grace be written on the table of thine heart; bind it on thine arm, or rather let it be graven on the palms of thy hands, to animate thy zeal for his glory, that thou mayeſt appear to be his in that day when he makes up his jewels.

LECTURE

LECTURE XXIX.

LORD of hoſts; whence that magnificent title; the day when he will make up his jewels; and what implied in ſo doing.

THAT a book of remembrance was written before the LORD, in favor of his people, might juſtly inſpire them with courage under all their temptations, but he is graciouſly pleaſed to make a further revelation of his will, and to unfold this ſacred memorial; not to indulge a vain curioſity, but that they might be filled with peace and joy in believing, and preſs towards the mark of this glorious prize. This is the record: "And they ſhall be mine, ſaith the LORD "of hoſts, in that day when I make up my jewels; "and I will ſpare them as a man ſpareth his own ſon "that ſerveth him." Other paſſages intimate the notice God takes of the thoughts, affections, reſolutions, prayers, tears and ſervices of his ſaints, and they warrant us to conclude that theſe are all punctually inſcribed in this book; but here we have an expreſs recital of its contents, from whence the faithful may certainly know what is written in heaven concerning them. And, who can forbear with the pſalmiſt to admire and ſay: "O LORD, how great is thy "goodneſs which thou haſt laid up for them that truſt "in thee before the ſons of men!"

THIS

THIS is not the conjecture of man but the counſel of God, on which alone that hope depends, which is the anchor of the ſoul; it is what the LORD of hoſts ſaith; a diſtinguiſhing character firſt adopted by Hannah, when ſhe vowed in the bitterneſs of her ſoul, 1 Sam. i. 11. Jehovah is the LORD of hoſts, as he ruleth in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, in which reſpect the number of his forces are not to be told, they comprehend every creature on whom his light ſhines, Job xxv. 3. In this illuſtrious character, are diſplayed the majeſty, power, and glory of the moſt High over all; but I apprehend it chiefly reſpects him as King of ſaints, and as the commander of the people he hath redeemed; it ſeems a title peculiar to Jehovah the Son, and to be originally derived from his conducting the Iſraelites out of Egypt into Canaan, of whom it is ſaid, Exod. vi. 26. that they were brought "from the land of Egypt, accord-"ing to their armies or hoſts." And again, chap. xii. 41. "In the ſelf-ſame day it came to paſs that all "the hoſts of the LORD went out from the land "of Egypt;" and accordingly the ark on which the ſhekinah reſted was called by the "Name of the LORD "of hoſts, who dwelt between the cherubims," 2 Sam. vi. 2. This agrees with the character under which he appeared to Joſhua, chap. v. 15. "The Captain of the "LORD's hoſts," to whom divine honor is paid, which correſponds with Iſa. lv. 4. where the Father ſaith, "I have given him—a leader and commander of the "people." Now this ſignificant and ſingular character is aſſumed in the proclamation before us; and this

was

was the grand and ſtriking manner in which the prophets came forth: "Thus ſaith the LORD, *the* LORD "*of hoſts*," from whoſe mouth the report comes to the heart with authority, and being mixed with faith, produces an aſſured expectation of the promiſe; for who ſhall queſtion the word of the omnipotent and unchangeable God?

AND what ear is not open when the LORD of hoſts ſpeaks? Who is not waiting to know what the King of heaven will pronounce at the head of his troops? He will ſurely declare ſomething *great* and *good*, like himſelf, to the joy of his ſaints; of this David was confident, Pſalm lxxxv. 6. "The LORD will ſpeak peace to his "people and to his ſaints;" nor was he miſtaken: he utters his voice from his heavenly throne, under whom rank, in order, the innumerable company of angels, archangels, cherubims and ſeraphims, with the patriarchs, apoſtles, and a multitude of ſpirits made perfect, who were redeemed unto God by his blood, all ſilent to *know*, and ſwift to *perform* his ſovereign pleaſure; and lo his command is to inſcribe this decree from his lips! "And they ſhall be mine, ſaith the LORD of "hoſts, in the day when I make up my jewels; and "I will ſpare them as a man ſpareth his own ſon that "ſerveth him." No leſs honor is inſured them who think on the Name of the LORD: it contains all their ſalvation and all their deſire; leſs could not ſatisfy them; more is not wanting to render them compleatly happy for ever.

THE

THE period referred to is the laſt and great day; for though the deſtruction of the Jews is pointed at in this prophecy, on the credit of which, as confirmed by our LORD, many fled * and eſcaped, whom ſome count theſe jewels; yet this fearful inſtance of vengeance, however like that yet to come, did not amount to the deſcription given of this day of the LORD, which we are told, "ſhall burn as an oven, and utterly conſume all "that do wickedly," inſomuch that it ſhall leave them neither root nor branch: but this was not the caſe in the deſtruction of Jeruſalem; indeed multitudes periſhed in a terrible manner, yet their poſterity remain to this day in ſin and unbelief; neither did the righteous then tread down the wicked as aſhes under the ſoles of their feet; nor ſhall *we* diſcern between him that ſerveth God and him that ſerveth him not; all which is declared of this day, till Jeſus is revealed from heaven to judge the ſecrets of men, and render to every one according to his deeds.

IN this gracious declaration from the LORD of hoſts, we are to note, whoſe property the righteous ſhall be at his glorious appearance, the mercy they ſhall then obtain, and how that ſolemn and intereſting period is deſcribed. It begins with the claim which the LORD will make in his people at his appearance and kingdom, "They ſhall be mine." Every creature is the LORD's, who is the Maker of all things; he hath an abſolute propriety and univerſal dominion over the works of his hands. All ſouls are his, angels and

* To Pella, a city of Macedonia.

and men; nor doth the apoſtacy and rebellion of either deprive the moſt High; but there is no certain connexion between being the LORD's by creation and natural right, and an eſcape from his wrath, as a righteous judge, who will not acquit; but this, we ſhall preſently ſee, ſtands connected with being *his* in the ſenſe of the text, "They ſhall be mine," *to me*, as it literally runs; i. e. my ſons, each one ſhall be to me as an own, dutiful, and beloved ſon to his affectionate and generous parent: This appears from their being ſpared as a ſon, according to the promiſe; for the infinitely wiſe and unchangeable Jehovah cannot miſapply the bleſſings of his love. He is undoubtedly a ſon whom the LORD deals with as ſuch. Again; "They ſhall be mine," i. e. *my jewels*. Now the jewels of a man are his treaſure, and this claim the LORD hath in his people, Exod. xix. 15. "Thou ſhalt "be to me a peculiar treaſure above all the people "of the earth." The expreſſion carries in it more than bare property, however valuable, it is an alluſion to jewels purchaſed and appropriated to a man's own uſe, and for the diſplay of his perſonal glory on certain occaſions, of which more hereafter. Theſe ideas correſpond with the relation ſubſiſting between God and his people, whom he hath choſen, redeemed, and ſet apart for himſelf: "The LORD hath choſen Jacob for "himſelf, and Iſrael for his peculiar treaſure," or jewels, for the word is the ſame, Pſalm cxxxv. 4. "They "ſhall be mine." But are not the righteous now his? Doubtleſs they are; being called by grace, they appear to be his; under a perſuaſion of which they may boldly ſay, "I am the LORD's," Iſa. xliv. 5. or, as in

Cant.

Cant. vii. 10. "I am my Beloved's, and his deſire is "towards me." Thus ſaith the LORD to the ſeed of Jacob, "I have called thee by thy name, *thou art* "*mine*," Iſa. xliii. 1. This is the characteriſtic of them who fear God, by the teſtimony of his word, and in which they can ſometimes rejoice, when ſealed with the Spirit of adoption; and in many inſtances the LORD hath owned his people in the diſpenſation of his providence, by which their enemies, who oppreſſed them, have been made to know, to their coſt, that he "that "toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye;" nevertheleſs, in this ſtate of imperfection and trial, they are often obſcured in infirmities, afflictions and perſecutions, under which they lie concealed, and their real character queſtioned by themſelves and others. In this dark and doubtful ſituation, the enemy is ready to inſult, and they are but too prone to fear that they are not the children of God; but in the day when Chriſt makes up his jewels, theſe clouds ſhall vaniſh away, they ſhall be manifeſtly his, and be filled with courage and joy when he will confeſs them before his Father and his angels. "They ſhall be mine," ſaith the LORD of hoſts, evidently mine: I will inveſt myſelf with them, and be glorified in them; then ſhall ſmall and great know, and every creature, in that univerſal aſſembly, acknowledge they are mine, when my glory is revealed upon them; it ſhall then be manifeſt that they are mine, whom the Father hath given me, my ſheep, for whom I laid down my life, my choſen, called and faithful ones.

WITH this honor and joy, ſtands connected the mercy of our LORD Jeſus Chriſt, expreſſed in theſe words, "I will ſpare them as a man ſpareth his own ſon "that

" that ſerveth him." Some refer this to the dealings of God with his children in time; q. d. they ſhall be mine in the day when I make up my jewels; till then I will ſpare, i. e. have pity on them; I will not enter into judgment with them; but pardon and accept them, nothwithſtanding all their imperfections; and no doubt the believer is indebted to the ſparing mercy of the LORD while in their natural ſtate, till called into fellowſhip with him; and in all his diſpenſations, even in his chaſtenings, he correcteth them as a father a ſon in whom he delights; but it is reaſonable to refer both clauſes to the ſame period, even to that day of the LORD when vengeance ſhall be taken on the wicked. The word * properly ſignifies to be propitious, favorable, or compaſſionate, even to ſhew mercy to them who in juſtice might be deſtroyed. " As I live, ſaith the " LORD, I will not ſpare, neither will I pity," Ezek. v. 11. i. e. I will execute juſtice, " becauſe thou haſt " defiled my ſanctuary." Thus God ſpared not the angels that ſinned, but *caſt them down to hell*, nor *the old world*, 2 Pet. ii. 4, 5. In this ſenſe alſo the Father ſpared not his own Son, but delivered him up to juſtice for our ſins, which indeed is the legal ground of that mercy which the righteous ſhall obtain according to this promiſe. I will ſpare them, ſo as not to inflict the puniſhment or evil their iniquities deſerve; as a prince ſpares the life of a criminal, or traitor, which he might juſtly have taken away, or rather as a parent dealeth with his own ſon, whom he will not puniſh according to his deſert. This ſparing mercy is a kind of pity proceeding from love, by which the ſubject is ſaved from deſerved

* חמל.

deſerved puniſhment; and this mercy is looked for by them who think on the Name of the LORD, Jude xxii. In that awful day, when the righteous vengeance of a ſin-hating God ſhall conſume the wicked as with fire, thoſe devouring flames ſhall not kindle upon them, they ſhall be wholly and perfectly ſpared; not a drop of wrath ſhall fall on them! yea, ſaith the LORD, "I will "ſpare them as a man ſpareth his own ſon that *ſerveth* "*him*," they ſhall be treated as innocent, or as though they had never offended: wonderful mercy indeed! They ſhall not only be entirely ſecure from the puniſhment of ſin, but they ſhall be juſtified and openly acquitted at the tribunal-ſeat, which juſtification ſtands inſeparably connected with life everlaſting. So then, to be ſpared in the ſenſe of this promiſe, is nothing ſhort of compleat and eternal ſalvation.

IN this illuſtration of the mercy which the righteous ſhall obtain at the appearance and kingdom of their Saviour, we may note, the character under which this grace ſhall be brought unto them, viz. that of own ſons; this beſpeaks new covenant-relation, out of which covenant no ſinner ſhall be ſpared in that day. Chriſt is the judge, by commiſſion from the Father, and the mercy he diſpenſes from his throne, terminates on thoſe adopted ſons, whoſe ſafe conduct to glory was the end of his ſufferings and death; and accordingly we find that he inveſts them in the following terms, "Come ye bleſſed "of my FATHER." To which agrees Rev. xxi. 7. "He that overcometh ſhall inherit all things, and I "will be his God, and he ſhall be my ſon." We

are further taught by this alluſion, the pleaſure and joy with which the LORD will thus ſpare them that fear him. When a father corrects his own ſon, he ſtill delights in him, though his conduct requires chaſtiſement; but if a parent, in the character of a judge, is called to ſentence and puniſh condemned malefactors, among whom his own child has been numbered, can in juſtice acquit, or ſpare him from the miſerable deſtruction of the guilty, with what tranſporting joy muſt he diſcharge and defend him; who can ſay, or fully conceive, the delight an affectionate father muſt take in thus ſparing his beloved ſon? This is the time, O believer, when thy God will "rejoice over thee," Iſa. lxii. 5. "He will rejoice "over thee with joy: he will reſt in his love, he will "joy over thee with ſinging," Zeph. iii. 17.

THIS notable day is deſcribed from a ſingular and intereſting tranſaction which is then to take place: "In the day when I make up my jewels." It has already been ſhewn, that the jewels of the LORD are no other than thoſe who love, and think upon his Name; theſe are his dear and precious property, prepared and reſerved for his glory; now theſe jewels he will *make up* †. The firſt and obvious idea of which is *collection*. It alludes to a prince or rich man whoſe plate and jewels, being depoſited and diſperſed in different places, are on ſome grand occaſion gathered together for the diſplay of his magnificence. Thus on ſet-times the great men of the earth make up their veſſels of gold and of ſilver;

† עשה

ver; and likewiſe their diamonds and other curious ſtones of beauty and value, with which they adorn themſelves and make their appearance, on marriage-feaſts, or on other public occaſions, to be admired in their affluence and grandeur: In like manner the LORD will collect his people, who, as we have ſeen, are his peculiar treaſure. "Gather my ſaints together unto me, thoſe "who have made a covenant with me by ſacrifice," Pſalm l. 5. And again, "And he ſhall ſend his angels "with a great ſound of a trumpet, and they ſhall "gather together his elect from the four winds, from "one end of the heaven to the other," Matt. xxiv. 31. both which places evidently refer to the day of judgment, when all the redeemed ſhall be together in one body, with their glorified Head.

BUT ſimple collection is not peculiar to the ſaints, for in that day ſmall and great, without exception, ſhall ſtand before God; the wicked will be gathered as well as the righteous. The expreſſion alſo imports their luſtre and beauty, and points to the glorious manner in which the righteous ſhall then appear together with Chriſt; "when I make up," i. e. when I finiſh, poliſh, or compleat them, that they may appear in the utmoſt perfection. This is the gradation of the LORD's work on his people, Iſa. xliii. 7. "I have *created* him for my glory, I have *formed* him, yea, I have *made* him," or, according to the rendring before us, for it is the ſame word, *made up*; and it is well known that in the making up of jewels, in order to a magnificent appearance, they are cut, ſet and poliſhed, that their brightneſs may appear. Thus the ſaints ſhall be glorioufly

finiſhed at the coming of their LORD, when called to the marriage-ſupper of the Lamb, and ſhine in the kingdom of their Father. They who fear the LORD have the principle of glory and beauty in themſelves, not indeed by nature, in which reſpect the compariſon fails; they are naturally polluted and guilty, naked and bare, which is ſhameful, but, being partakers of grace in Chriſt, they are the excellent of the earth, and have a real and ſubſtantial glory belonging to them: Covered with the ſpotleſs robe of his mediatorial righteouſneſs; their cloathing is wrought gold, and their brightneſs as a bridegroom which decketh himſelf as a prieſt, and as a bride adorneth herſelf with her jewels; but the finiſhing theſe ſpiritual jewels reſpects their internal holineſs and perſonal beauty, as renewed in the image of God, unto a divine and eternal life, which is the honor and happineſs of the creature, and will extend to their whole perſons at the reſurrection. Grace is the eſſence of glory, which cannot be fully diſplayed in a ſtate of ſin and mortality, but when JESUS makes up his jewels, they ſhall not only be compleat in their number, not one being miſſing, but each ſhall be finiſhed in the higheſt manner. In that day they who are the LORD's, whether found among the quick or the dead, ſhall be brought forth in his likeneſs; then each ſaint will be wrought up to the greateſt perfection and bear his part in new Jeruſalem, when that holy city comes down from GOD out of heaven, as a bride adorned for her huſband.

THERE is yet another thing implied, without which a number of jewels can never appear with advantage, namely,

namely, their due diſpoſition. The beauty of all precious ſtones, however excellent in their nature, or poliſhed by art, will be ſeen in proportion to the order in which they are placed; a proper adjuſtment in this reſpect is needful to a compleat view of a brilliant diamond, or other precious ſtone, and accordingly ſome read the words, I diſpoſe, i. e. order, my jewels, as the ſtones of a crown, ſet by a ſkilful hand, for a diſplay of their luſtre in every point of light, to charm the ſpectator; for then the ſaints, thus collected into one ſtately body, will be as a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God. In all bodies who make their appearance, individual members ſhine in their place, and the glory of the proceſſion depends upon order; a ſaint out of order, is like a looſe jewel that is ſcattered or concealed in a corner; he cannot diſplay the beauty of holineſs, the obedience of faith, or his love to the LORD Jeſus Chriſt, but lies as it were in obſcurity and contributes nothing towards the luſtre of his Redeemer's kingdom on earth, which is greatly eclipſed by a neglect of an orderly profeſſion, or not walking in the Name of the LORD, as becometh his ſaints; but at the reſurrection every man will appear in his own order, 1 Cor. xv. There will be no confuſion or miſplace in that general aſſembly and church of the firſt-born, every jewel ſhall be in its place; from whence it will appear in the moſt ſtriking manner to its own advantage, and the glory of all with whom it ſtands in connexion.

THIS is the gracious aſſurance from the mouth of the LORD, in favor of thoſe who think on his Name.

In the laſt and great day, when all the workers of iniquity ſhall be rejected and puniſhed, and the vengeance of a ſin-hating God, by the wrath of the Lamb, ſhall come down on the wicked, to their eternal perdition, theſe ſaints ſhall appear to be his, his dear and valuable treaſure, to his honor and glory; he will then make them up as his jewels, gather them together, perfectly finiſh and duly diſpoſe them in his illuſtrious myſtical body, when he ſhall preſent her a glorious church to himſelf; then ſhall all his faithful ſervants obtain mercy, be ſpared from the juſt deſert of their manifold tranſgreſſions, yea, and treated as innocent, being juſtified and accepted, as though they had never offended; and in one word, as the ſons of God, with joy and delight, the Judge, their Redeemer, in the name of his Father, will poſſeſs them with life everlaſting.

It appears from this account, that the Lord hath a people ſet apart for himſelf, his peculiar treaſure; that theſe jewels are at preſent ſcattered and divided, but that on the day of his appearance they ſhall be made up, or compleated, when they ſhall obtain his mercy unto eternal life, in which they will find an ample reward for all their ſufferings for righteouſneſs ſake, and their love to his Name. An improvement on theſe points will be the ſubject of an other lecture, which will finiſh the deſign we are upon; for the preſent it may ſuffice to obſerve, that the expectation of the believer is ſure, it reſts not on any uncertain conjecture, however probable, nor is it a concluſion drawn from the moſt plauſible reaſonings of man; his hope

hope is in the teſtimony of God, and its foundations lie deep and ſecure in the immutability of his counſel, and guarded by every perfection of deity. "I wait for the LORD, my ſoul doth wait, in his word do I hope," Pſalm cxxx. 5. Nothing ſhort of the expreſs declaration of the LORD himſelf, lies at the bottom of our hope in Chriſt, it holds in the promiſe, and centers in Jehovah, who abideth faithful, for he cannot deny himſelf: "In hope of eternal life which God that "cannot lie, promiſed before the world began," Tit. i. 2. The LORD hath ſpoken, and who ſhall diſſannul it? His "word is forever ſettled in the heavens, and "his faithfulneſs eſtabliſhed above the clouds;" he is the LORD of hoſts, he ſpeaks and it is done, he commands and it ſtands faſt; the ſoul that depends on his word may challenge the univerſe, and look upon every creature as an inſtrument in the hand of God, ſo far as it may affect him, to bring about his expectation and hope; "all things work together for good to them "who love God," whoſe purpoſe, according to which they are called, ſhall ſtand, certainly ſtand, "for if "God be for us who can be againſt us?" This then is the chorus of the church, or the repeated ſong of the faithful in ſociety, "The LORD of hoſts is with us, "the God of Jacob is our refuge, Selah." This hope is infallible; that every one who thinks on the Name of the LORD ſhall be *his*, in the day when he makes up his jewels, and that he "will ſpare ſuch, as a man "ſpareth his own ſon that ſerveth him; for this is as the "waters of Noah, Iſa. liv. 7—10. As the LORD hath "ſworn that the waters of Noah ſhall no more go over "the earth, ſo hath he ſworn he will not be wrath with

" his people, nor rebuke them in the day of his anger," " Surely in the floods of great waters they ſhall not " come nigh unto them. He will be their hiding-place, " and will compaſs them about with ſongs of deliver- " ance," Pſalm xxxii. 6, 7.

Nor ſhall the happineſs of the ſaint be delayed; his ſalvation ſlumbereth not. Under ſome circumſtances he may now be impatient, not making the teſtimonies of the Lord the men of his counſel, but rather leaning to his own underſtanding, and eſpecially when his enemies inſult, and tauntingly ſay, Where is the promiſe of his coming? The chriſtian may then be ready to cry, O Lord how long! or in the mother of Siſera's words, in relation to her ſon, " Why is his chariot ſo long in " coming? Why tarry the wheels of his *chariot?*" But the Lord is not ſlack concerning his promiſe; the day is at hand when it ſhall come to paſs that, as ſure as the Lord brought forth the children of Iſrael, the ſelf-ſame day appointed four hundred and thirty years before its commencement; in like manner the ſalvation of God ſhall not tarry; " of that day and hour no man " knoweth;" it is a ſecret in the boſom of the Father, Mat. xi. 27. and it will be ſuddenly revealed; but of this we are certain, that a time is fixed, and that it nearly approaches, when Chriſt will make up his jewels; nor ſhall earth or hell be able to procraſtinate the hour of this bleſſed hope; he ſaith, " Surely I come " quickly: Amen; even ſo, come Lord Jeſus.

LECTURE

LECTURE XXX.

Chriſt's people comparable with jewels; their diſperſion in time; the certainty of their accompliſhment at his coming. Reflections.

FROM the promiſe explained in the preceding lecture, it is evident that the LORD has a peculiar people, who are ſtiled his jewels; that at preſent theſe are diſperſed, but that a day is at hand, when he will compleat them, and that then he will own and honor them as a father his dear and dutiful ſon. The Reader's attention is once more intreated, while I attempt to improve the delightful ſubject, by ſhewing the propriety of the metaphor under which the choſen are deſcribed, in what reſpects they lie ſcattered abroad, and the reaſons there are to conclude that they ſhall certainly be gathered and ſpared, according to the word of the LORD; theſe particulars, with a glance on the ample reward the righteous will find in this grace, and ſuitable reflections, will finiſh my deſign.

IN this glorious prophecy, the LORD mentions his jewels, which he will make up at his coming; now, that theſe are no other than his people, who think on his Name, appears from the aſſurance he gives them that they ſhall be *his* at that time, which amounts to a promiſe of being counted in his treaſure in the day of revelation, and the aptneſs of the deſcription before us will appear when we conſider,

I. THAT

1. THAT *their number is certain.* The jewels of a prince or great man, are known and determinate portions or parts of his peculiar treaſure. For a man to make up his jewels, we have ſeen, is to accompliſh their number or gather them altogether, but how can this be if their number is uncertain with the owner? Can a rich man be ſuppoſed unacquainted with thoſe precious things which he hath ſet apart for himſelf, or his perſonal glory? Much leſs is it decent to imagine that there is any uncertainty with the LORD in reſpect of the ſaints, the knowledge of whom is eſſential to the idea of making them up, it being impoſſible to compleat an indefinite number of objects: The people of God are a certain choſen generation, whom the Father has adopted to himſelf in Chriſt, who hath redeemed them with his blood, and is charged with their recovery and ſalvation; theſe are veſſels of mercy afore prepared unto glory, being ordained to life everlaſting, whoſe number cannot in the nature of things be increaſed or diminiſhed. I am ſenſible this holy doctrine of the Bible is diſagreeable to the taſte of men who lean to their own underſtanding; but however they who ſubmit not themſelves to the divine ſovereignty in the diſpenſations of grace, may contradict and blaſpheme, this foundation of God ſtandeth ſure; "the Lord know-"eth them that are his:" This ſober and rational truth, is ſupported by many expreſs and ſtrong declarations, and indeed by the current of ſcripture, yea, it is inſeparably connected with the way of ſalvation opened in the goſpel; for take away the doctrine of election,

election, and the notion of a proper ſacrifice of atonement, and redemption by the Son of God, as the ſubſtitute of ſinners, is not to be ſupported; but the ſcriptures declare that "Chriſt hath redeemed us from "the curſe of the law, being made a curſe for us," Gal. iii. 13. And again, "He hath made him to be "ſin for us, who knew no ſin, that we might be made "the righteouſneſs of God in him," 2 Cor. v. 25. This idea of the ſaints, ſeems couched under the figure before us, which ſhews its propriety. Jewels are a certain known number of precious veſſels, which however depoſited at preſent in different places, are to be collected, in order, on particular occaſions for the honor of thoſe who poſſeſs them. In like manner we have ſeen, "that the Son of man ſhall ſend his angels "with the great ſound of a trumpet, and they ſhall "gather together his elect from the four winds, from "one end of heaven to the other." But,

2. THIS figure ſtands illuſtrated by the *very high eſteem* of the LORD for his people. Jewels are exceedingly valued by their owner; and our Saviour hath obſerved what univerſal experience confirms, Matt. vi. 21. "that where the treaſure," i. e. the peculiar portion and joy of a man is, "there will his heart be alſo." Now the LORD hath ſet his affections on his people, and therefore he choſe them, Deut. vii. 7. They are ſealed on his heart, Cant. viii. 6. They are the objects of his ſpecial unchangeable and eternal love, precious and honorable in his ſight. This choice and eſteem aroſe not from any motive in them. Neither a foreſight of their miſery, or their faith, or any thing comparatively

better

better or worſe, properly and ſimply, induced the Almighty to regard them above others; no, they are eſteemed as his elect, and he ſet them apart, of his meer good pleaſure, as the Sovereign of grace; but, having thus choſe them for himſelf, they are dear to him, inſomuch that he that toucheth them, "toucheth the apple of his eye," Zech. ii. 8. Again,

3. THEY may well be thus ſtiled on account of the *price* he paid for them. Jewels are coſtly, and uſually obtained with a very great ſum. Thus of wiſdom it is ſaid, "She ſhall not be exchanged for jewels of fine gold, and her price exceeds that of rubies," Job xxviii. 17, 18. To the ſame purpoſe we read, Matt. xiii. 46. of the having found one pearl of great price, went and ſold all that he had, and bought it. As hinted already, there was no ſingular excellency in the people of God, in their natural or creation ſtate, much leſs as involved in the fatal apoſtacy of man, to commend them in the ſight of Jehovah; but having ſet his love upon them, and they being under a ſentence of death, and children of wrath and diſobedience as others, they were dearly bought out of the hands of juſtice; redeemed, not with corruptible things as ſilver and gold, but with blood; not with the blood of bulls or of goats, but with the precious blood of the Son of God, who was manifeſt in the fleſh, and who, in reſpect of his innocence as man, and the deſignation of the Father, was as a lamb without blemiſh or ſpot. "Ye are, ſaith the apoſtle, bought with *a price*," 1 Cor. vi. 20. No trifling or inadequate conſideration ranſomed theſe veſſels of pleaſure and mercy; the expreſſion is ſtrong,

ſtrong, and carries in it that a full price was paid for them, it points to the equitable, yea to the unſpeakable value of that which the LORD laid down for his people. Ineffable indeed; he gave *himſelf* for them, and poured out his ſoul unto death, that he might poſſeſs and enjoy them! No jewels, however comparatively immenſe in their value, were purchaſed at the rate of Chriſt's people; their price, on the higheſt poſſible computation, falls infinitely below that by which the choſen were redeemed. And further,

4. THE alluſion is juſt in reſpect of their *virtue and goodneſs*. Jewels have an intrinſic worth, and are of real value to him that poſſeſſes them. So are the ſaints, they are the excellent of the earth, Pſalm xvi. 3. In their apoſtate ſtate they are vile and unprofitable; and ſince their converſion, their fleſh which cleaves to them is baſe; yet being called, and choſen, and faithful, they are dignified in the righteouſneſs of God, which is by faith, "unto all and upon all them that believe." In this robe they are decked, as a prieſt with his jewels, Iſa. lxi. 10. They are likewiſe choice in regard of their inherent righteouſneſs; there is ſome good thing wrought *in* them, by the Holy Ghoſt; they are *really*, though in reſpect of degree but *imperfectly*, ſanctified, and in proportion to their light, faith, love, and fruits, truly valuable, and accordingly, Lam. iv. theſe ſtones of the ſanctuary, the precious ſons of Zion, are compared to fine and pure gold. Moreover,

5. As jewels, the people of God are moſt carefully preſerved. Men lock up their treaſure in a cabinet or place

place of great ſafety; and the LORD preſerves them that love him; they are hid and preſerved from being loſt or deſtroyed: They dwelt on his heart and were ſecured in the covenant, choſen in Chriſt, who is the ſecret place of the moſt High, from everlaſting. In the time of their ignorance, when in the world and in the kingdom of ſatan, they were preſerved in him, and, being called, they are ſecure in his hands, his eye is continually upon them, and he keeps them, as with a garriſon ‡, by his power, for "as the mountains are "round about Jeruſalem, ſo the LORD is round about "his people from henceforth even for ever," Pſalm cxxv. 2. And,

6. THIS metaphor is proper on account of the *glory* they reflect on the Saviour. Jewels are for ornament; in them, on certain occaſions, perſons of rank make a magnificent appearance, agreeable to their diſtinguiſhing character. In like manner, Jeſus doth and will ſhine in his choſen; he is now adorned by their obedience of faith and fruits of righteouſneſs, which redound to his honor and praiſe, and in ſome periods the LORD has ſhone in the beauty of Zion in general, when his glory has riſen upon her, then this flock of his people, whom he hath ſaved, are as the ſtones of a crown lifted up, Zech. ix. 16. or, Iſa. lxii. 3. as "a crown of glory or a royal diadem in "his hand," but at his coming, when he ſhall deſcend from heaven, in the glory of his Father and his angels, he will alſo be "glorified in his ſaints, and admired in "all them that believe." Once more,

7. As

‡ φρουρουμένοις 1 Pet. i. 5. compared with 2 Cor xi. 32.

7. As jewels he will poſſeſs them for ever. A noble perſon, who regards his honor, will part with any thing rather than his jewels; for without theſe, on particular occaſions, his appearance will fall ſhort of his character, and diſgrace him. No man will diſpoſe of his peculiar treaſure, but in caſe of neceſſity; nor will the all-perfect and bleſſed Jehovah, who hath ſet apart the choſen for himſelf, ſuffer them to be loſt, or reſign them to any, for he reſts in his love, and will eternally rejoice in his people. So then they who fear the LORD may fitly be counted his jewels; they are a certain known number, precious in his eyes, and which he hath purchaſed at a very high rate; beſides their real beauty and worth, conſidered as ſaints, his care to preſerve them, the honor they do him both now and hereafter, and, in a word, his determination to enjoy them forever; theſe are ſufficient to juſtify, yea, and finely illuſtrate the propriety of the metaphor.

Now theſe jewels are united in the purpoſe of the Father; their names are together in the Lamb's book of life; they are from the beginning, before God, in a myſtical union with Chriſt, who is the head of his body the church, and of the flock committed to the charge of Jeſus, the ſhepherd and biſhop of ſouls; nevertheleſs it appears that for a ſeaſon they lie in a ſcattered and divided condition, and that in the following reſpects,

1. IN the period of their actual exiſtence. The all-comprehenſive mind of the infinite Jehovah, from eternity viewed the objects of his love, and choſe them at once,

once, but they are produced by degrees, both in nature and grace; in reſpect of the former, which is the point before me, they deſcend by ordinary generation from Adam, and are brought forth, ſome in one age and ſome in another; hence they are as it were diſperſed in different ages and nations of the world, from the creation to the diſſolution of the heavens and the earth. This natural diviſion or ſeparation in time, no doubt is under the conduct of Infinite wiſdom; and in the day when he makes up his jewels will turn out to the glory of God, and the ſatisfaction and joy of his ſaints. Again,

2. THESE choſen, who are cotemporaries in this world, are ſcattered abroad in the earth; the bounds of their habitations are fixed in common with others, and it is probable in ſome inſtances, with a ſpecial view, ſubſervient to the purpoſe of divine grace, for many have been called in conſequence of their ſituation; however the children of God are locally diſperſed, ſome in one place, and others elſewhere, inſomuch that few of them comparatively can aſſemble together and have perſonal and frequent interviews; hence a particular church-ſtate is appointed, and needful to the ſupport of ſocial religion. The like might be obſerved in reſpect of their different ſtations and circumſtances in the preſent *life*; but, in *death* they are ſtill more divided. Under the dominion of this laſt and great enemy, for a while, they are not only ſeparated from others, but each individual is in a ſtate of diſperſion; his ſpirit is gathered to the throne of God and of the Lamb, while the tabernacle of his body, having ſeen corruption, is diſſolved

diſſolved into aſhes and duſt; and thus theſe bodies lie ſcattered in the grave till the morning of the reſurrection. In ſhort, if we take a general view of the people whom the LORD hath ſet apart for himſelf, and who are ſtiled his jewels, as they appear in the glaſs of the word, at the inſtant period we ſhall behold an innumerable multitude already paſſed through the revolutions of time, who are through faith and patience inheriting the promiſes. In the unſeen and eternal world, as already obſerved, they are in a kind of perſonal diſperſion, their bodies and ſouls being at preſent in a ſtate of ſeparation; we ſhall likewiſe ſee many now living, who may be conſidered as called, or in a ſtate of nature, for though revelation doth not diſcover the particular veſſels of mercy, while in the kingdom of darkneſs, yet they bear witneſs to a choſen ſeed who ſhall be ſaved in every age and generation, ſo that we have a general and certain knowledge of faith, that, beſides viſible ſaints, there are ſome of theſe jewels exiſting on the earth, who ſurely ſhall be gathered, though the number of ſuch which remain in any period, or any individual of them, is reſerved till the appointed time of converſion. And further, if we look forward, it appears from the word of the LORD, that there are children yet unborn, who ſhall in ſucceeding ages be a ſeed to ſerve him, and that in the latter day a glorious harveſt ſhall be gathered, both of Jews and Gentiles. And, finally, that at the revelation of Chriſt, though the greater number of theſe precious ſaints will be gathered from their graves, ſome will deſcend with him in their glorified bodies from heaven, and at the ſame time not a few will be found alive on the earth. Thus divided are

the peculiar treaſure of the LORD in time, under providence, through the univerſe, in every generation, paſt, preſent, and to come; ſome dead, ſome alive, ſome yet rebelling in the kingdom of ſatan, while others are reduced to the obedience of faith, and are rejoicing in the LORD as their God; and when the laſt trumpet ſounds, the elect ſhall be gathered from heaven, earth, and hell, or the grave; but, however diſperſed, they are ſecure and forth coming. The LORD will certainly make up theſe jewels; their number ſhall be compleated, and not one ſhall be wanting, when he appears in his glory, of which bleſſed hope the following particulars are a full confirmation:

1. IT hath already been ſhewn that they are his choſen dear property; he hath ſet his love upon them, ſhed his blood for them; they are his treaſure and his glory as Mediator, and will he ſuffer one of theſe to be loſt? What man would loſe a jewel of his treaſure, or ſuffer it to lie in a total and final obſcurity? The delight the LORD hath in his people, and eſpecially when joined to his purchaſe, is an abundant ſecurity for their being gathered to himſelf in due time. And,

2. IF theſe are not made up, the end of his chooſing and redeeming them is loſt. It was to ſhew the riches of his glory, that theſe veſſels of mercy were ſelected and ranſomed; the ultimate view of all this grace, is the honor of God, in the perfection of his people; this was the end of the divine counſel from everlaſting; for this purpoſe the Father choſe his ſaints in Chriſt, and conſtituted his Son the head of the church, and the Saviour of

of the body. Agreeable to this, Chriſt having loved his church, gave himſelf for her, that he might preſent her to himſelf a glorious church, Eph. v. 27. But this will not be accompliſhed while a jewel is miſſing, there would then be a defect or ſchiſm in the body, nor will the glory or happineſs of any one ſaint be abſolutely, and in all reſpects compleat, till the whole election of grace appear united in one body, and each member finiſhed and ſet in his place. In a word, Jeſus died "that he might gather together in one, the chil-"dren of God that were ſcattered abroad," John xi. 52. Not only thoſe of the nation of the Jews, but alſo the choſen among the Gentiles; ſo that if any one is left behind, Chriſt died in vain; a notion to be utterly rejected. See Gal. ii. 21. But again,

3. Of this the believer hath an earneſt in his effectual calling. Every chriſtian may ſafely argue from the beginning to the completion of a divine work in his ſoul, Phil. i. 6. Shall the Almighty forſake his own work, or leave it unfiniſhed? It cannot be decently ſuppoſed. What ſhould hinder the Lord from making up, or, as the word imports, finiſhing any one of his jewels, which he hath ſet apart, redeemed, and called by his grace! Not the unworthineſs of the ſubject, nor any, however ſeeming unſurmountable, difficulties that lie in the way, ſeeing what he hath already done with reſpect to this choſen veſſel of mercy, and eſpecially in turning him from darkneſs to light, and ſlaying the enmity of his mind; this I ſay is no leſs, if not a greater inſtance of grace and power than is required unto the perfection of him who is already waſhed and ſanc-

tified; nor can any reaſon be given why the unchangeable and living God ſhould ſuffer his mercy to fail, contrary to his ſolemn engagements to maintain it for ever. He then who hath been gathered by the hand of the LORD out of the world, and is numbered with them who are ſanctified by faith, may be aſſured that they ſhall be made up, and counted among his jewels at laſt, and eſpecially when we conſider further,

4. THE infinite perfection and glorious power of the moſt High, with whom all things are poſſible. Theſe have already been diſplayed in their exiſtence and converſion; it is highly unreaſonable to queſtion whether he that created his people, and redeemed them from the dominion of ſin and the power of ſatan, can make them perfect in holineſs, and preſent them faultleſs, and finiſhed, in the day of his appearance, and equally abſurd to imagine that any thing needful to compleat the ſaints, can lie out of the reach of unſearchable Wiſdom and divine Omnipotence; nothing of theſe jewels, however diſperſed, is hid from the LORD, or beyond the reach of his arm; their being made up carries in it the reſurrection of their bodies, which at preſent, as we have ſeen, are diſſolved and ſcattered in the grave, inſomuch that to an eye of ſenſe, their return ſeems impoſſible, yet reaſon proclaims that God is able to raiſe the dead; we are indebted to the goſpel for this light of life and immortality from death, yet reaſon is not more incapable of diſcovering this redemption of the body, to which the ſaints are adopted, than it is forward to atteſt its credibility, on the teſtimony of God.

So

So then, the affection the LORD hath for his people, the end of his choice, his purchaſe, and what he hath already done for, and wrought in them, and his almighty power, and other perfections, leave no room to queſtion but that he will make up his jewels, according to the word of his grace.

NOR is the hope of that mercy which ſtands connected with the glory to be revealed on the ſaints, in the day of Chriſt, leſs certain. Its foundation is laid in the ſubſtitution and ſufferings of the Son of God in their ſtead; all their iniquity was laid on him, and he bore away their ſins by the ſacrifice of himſelf. If God ſpared not his own Son, and Chriſt died for them, the faithful may be aſſured that they ſhall be ſpared in the day of his wrath; ſurely in the floods of great waters they ſhall not come nigh unto them; the Redeemer is their hiding-place, and will compaſs them about with ſongs of deliverance; this may alſo be gathered from the compaſſion already exerciſed towards them when in a ſtate of death and condemnation; he that patiently endured their enmity and rebellion, and plucked them as brands from the fire, will ſurely have mercy on them, and ſpare them in the day of his wrath; beſides, they are covered with the robe of his righteouſneſs, and waſhed in his blood; the righteouſneſs of God is upon them, and being now juſtified freely by his grace, they ſhall doubtleſs be ſaved from wrath through him, Rom. v. 9. Yea, and further, the experience of the chriſtian confirms it. Indeed the patience and goodneſs of the LORD in his providence, is no ſecurity againſt the vengeance of the Almighty, who endures with much long-ſuffering

ing the veſſels of wrath; yet, alas, how often do ſinners preſume on an eſcape, becauſe the execution of their ſentence hath not taken place; but the preſent mercy and favor of God in a way of ſpecial grace to his called, aſcertains this bleſſed aſſurance, the gift of his Spirit, the light of his countenance, their communion with God at any time in his ordinances, their freedom of acceſs to him as their Father, and in a word, every inſtance of ſpiritual ſupply, or promiſe applied to their heart, is an evident token, or rather a taſte and earneſt, of that mercy the righteous ſhall obtain at the coming of Chriſt; ſo that there is not the leaſt room to heſitate their being ſpared by the LORD in the day when he makes up his jewels, even as a man ſpareth his own ſon that ſerveth him.

Now, that the honor and glory of being owned of the LORD, and ſpared as a dear and dutiful ſon, is beyond all expreſſion, and that it will turn out an ample reward for the tribulation and tears of his faithful diſciples, in a time of general apoſtacy, appears from the promiſe itſelf. No other conſideration is offered to ſatisfy and encourage his ſuffering people under the ſore temptations which befal them. The LORD doth not ſay, I will now avenge myſelf on the ungodly who profane my Name, and deſpiſe them who fear me; or, I will immediately deſcend as the dew on Iſrael, and remove the occaſions of her ſorrow, which is ſometimes the caſe, at the interceſſion of his mourners, but here is no abſolute promiſe of any alteration for the preſent, all that is propoſed to animate and comfort theſe gracious and afflicted ſouls is, that they ſhould be

his,

his, and that he would ſpare them in the day of his coming; but the divine Wiſdom and Goodneſs would not leave the righteous without a ſufficient reward; we may therefore be aſſured that in the accompliſhment of this promiſe they ſhall find a full recompence for all the ſelf-denial and grief to which their piety may have expoſed them. To this agrees the expreſs declaration of our Saviour and his inſpired apoſtles, and alſo the judgment of the faithful in all generations. Moſes choſe to ſuffer affliction with the people of God, and even eſteemed the reproach of Chriſt, greater riches than the treaſures of Egypt, having reſpect to this recompence of reward. And we read of many, who, being tortured, would not accept deliverance, on the condition of reſigning their hope, that they might obtain a better reſurrection, Heb. xi. If the honor and joy of the ſaints at the day of Chriſt will not abundantly compenſate for all the ſhame and ſorrow which they may endure in this world for his Name's ſake, theſe worthies were certainly under a deluſion, and of all men moſt miſerable; but "we know our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," ſo that we may juſtly "reckon that the ſufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which ſhall be revealed in us." Compare 2 Cor. iv. 17. with Rom. viii. 18. Of this reward many, whoſe trials have been great, have had a joyful earneſt in the witneſs of the Spirit, and the ſolace they have found in the houſe of the LORD; they who have endured the moſt for the teſtimony of their conſcience will

will acknowledge that the pleaſures of fellowſhip with God, and the ſatisfaction they have found in the communications of his grace, and eſpecially when they behold themſelves in Chriſt, through the Spirit of adoption; their delight and joy in God have far over-ballanced the pain and diſgrace of their ſufferings. Thus David, from his paſt experience in the ſanctuary, rejoices in this expectation, ſaying, "My mouth ſhall be "ſatisfied as with marrow and fatneſs," Pſalm lxiii. 5. and many like inſtances might be produced. Now if believers are ſo abundantly ſatisfied in what they at preſent enjoy, and find ſuch ample return for the ſelf-denial they are called to for the ſake of religion in their experience of the love of God in this world, what muſt be their glory and joy on being made up and finiſhed in the laſt and great day? To be the LORD's, and to be numbered with his jewels, when he appears in his kingdom, muſt be an honor and reward, of which they who attain to the higheſt degree of knowledge in the preſent ſtate, can form no adequate conception. "It "doth not yet appear, ſaith the apoſtle, what we ſhall "be," 1 John iii. 2. But we may ſoberly conclude that the reward of this inheritance will exceed the higheſt expectation of the moſt eminent ſaint on earth, and it may be of thoſe who in a ſeparate ſtate are already admitted to the throne in the heavens, however it certainly paſſeth the underſtanding of every mortal, and will fill the happy ſubjects with triumph and praiſe "unto him that loved them, and waſhed them from their "ſins in his own blood, and made them kings and "prieſts unto God, and his Father."

How

How melancholy and miſerable the caſe of thoſe, whom the LORD will reject, or leave behind in the day when he makes up his jewels? If it is the peculiar privilege of the righteous to be *his*, and to be ſpared in that awful day of deciſion and juſtice, let the Chriſtleſs ſinner beware; God will not ſpare thee, but will execute the fierceneſs of his anger! O how unconcerned are many about an intereſt in Chriſt, and being gathered with his peculiar treaſure at his coming; they conſider not the vengeance he will then take on them who diſobey him. It were better, Reader, thou hadſt never been born or exiſted, than not be found among the LORD's jewels at the ſeaſon referred to; when they ſhall ſhine forth in their beauty, aſcend up to glory, and poſſeſs the everlaſting kingdom of the Father, ſhame ſhall cover unbelievers, who will be then, O tremble, ye careleſs ones! caſt into the lake of fire, and lie down in ſorrow and darkneſs for ever!

BUT, art thou, dear Friend, waiting for the hope of righteouſneſs by faith? Haſt thou found the Pearl of great price? Is Chriſt thy dependence and delight, and exceeding precious to thy ſoul, ſo that all things are as nothing compared with his excellency and grace? Is his name ſo dear, that it occupies the thoughts of thine heart? And art thou grieved at the contempt caſt upon it by the ungodly, and when licentious profeſſors diſgrace it? Theſe are genuine ſymptoms of that holy fear which belongs to the children of God; and they who thus think on the Name of the LORD, are entitled to expect the honor of being Chriſt's at his coming.

And, Reader, is this thine experience? Doth thine heart rejoice in proſpect of being found among the people of the LORD, before the Father and his angels, in the day of revelation? Manifeſt this in thy profeſſed ſubjection to the goſpel of Chriſt. Can any man, with reaſon, be looked upon as a ſucceſsful candidate for the glory and joy of being the LORD's, when he makes up his jewels, to whom it is an indifferent matter, whether he appears to be his among men, or who will not confeſs him on earth. The importance, credit, and advantage of a public acknowledgment and worſhip of Jeſus, has been a principal deſign of theſe papers, how far they may ſucceed will hereafter appear; but I think it muſt be allowed an awkard and inconſiſtent part, for a perſon to boaſt in the view of being numbered with the ſaints in the day of revelation, and at the ſame time allow himſelf to be nameleſs among them in the ſight of mankind. Is it not ſtrange, that he who expects to be owned, ſpared and glorified, as a viſible member of Chriſt, in the univerſal aſſembly, at the tribunal of God, ſhould not think it his duty and honor to be openly joined to the LORD and his people, or that he ſhould not be aſhamed to live ſeparate from the viſible heirs of ſalvation? One would think it almoſt impoſſible that a man whoſe heart is fixed in the hope of being revealed in the church triumphant, could reſt ſhort of appearing in the church in her militant ſtate; it is a conduct ſo ungrateful, not to ſay abſurd, a ſenſible perſon will bluſh to find in himſelf, and it is hoped will repent; however, this is certain, that nothing can be more unreaſonable than to preſume we ſhall appear with Chriſt in glory, when he is revealed from heaven,

in

in a neglect of his honor on earth; and it becomes thoſe who amuſe themſelves with this expectation to ſee if it ſtands ſupported by the teſtimony of God, for an hope void of that foundation will ſurely deceive.

And now, Beloved, I take my farewel with an earneſt exhortation to my own ſoul and yours. Preſs forward, and haſten to the coming of the Lord. Bleſſed is the hope of his ſecond appearance! A day awful and fatal to the wicked, who ſhall be utterly conſumed, but, oh how delightful to the righteous who fear him. Then will their eternal glory commence; when every jewel ſhall be finiſhed, diſpoſed and ſet in the moſt beautiful point of light, and, the number of the elect, being accompliſhed, the adorable Redeemer will preſent his beloved church, faultleſs before the preſence of his glory, with exceeding joy. Animated with this divine hope, may all my dear Readers, with their unworthy writer, keep themſelves in the love of God, looking for the mercies of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt unto eternal life; who is over all, God bleſſed for ever. Amen.

FINIS.

Lately publiſhed, by the ſame Author,

1. THE Chriſtian's concern that he may not be a caſt-away, in two diſcourſes, price 8 d.

2. A Sermon on the deceaſe of his Royal Highneſs the late Duke of Cumberland, price 6 d.

3. The eternal exiſtence of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt conſidered and improved, price 6 d.

4. The Chriſtian's ſalutation, a farewel-ſermon, price 6 d.

5. The conſtitution of a goſpel-church adapted to union and peace, price 6 d.

6. Some thoughts on the indecency and danger of the believer's reſting ſhort of the communion of ſaints. The third edition, price 3 d. or 2 s. 6 d. per dozen.

6. An humble addreſs to the churches of Chriſt, not to forſake the aſſembling themſelves together. The ſecond edition, price 3 d. or 2 s. 6 d. per Dozen.